

Dazai, Chuuya, Fifteen Years Old (English Translation)

Summary:

The ghost of the previous boss haunts the Port Mafia. At fifteen, Osamu Dazai, under the careful eye of Ougai Mori, receives his first mission to investigate the matter. The investigation leads him to Chuuya Nakahara, the infamous "King of the Sheep", a rival group of juveniles. With his own past unknown to him, and the lives of Sheep members on the line thanks to the Port Mafia, Chuuya agrees to work alongside Dazai in order to unveil the truth behind the Port Mafia's former boss.



文豪 ストレイドッグス

太宰、中也、十五歳





“At the heart of the explosion was *not* the previous boss. It’s shape looked nothing like him. It wasn't even human.

A beast.
It was a black beast.”



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Prologue

A small, light passenger plane flew in the clear, blue sky. There was a lone passenger, a man with black clothes and sunglasses. Sweat was flowing down his pale face. He nervously looked around the airplane, devoid of anyone.

He was curling up like a young child who was swaying in the night breeze, and was holding his hand around his weapon with both hands.

The man was a mafioso.

He was currently running away from a powerful organization.

Suddenly, he heard a banging and knocking sound.

The man jumped up and saw the sound. Outside the window—

Outside the window—was a boy.

His age was about 14, 15 years old. He smiled on the plane from outside the window.

It was impossible... he was in an airliner that was flying over 500 meters above the ground.

"Yo. Pardon the intrusion." The boy outside the window said, moving his lips.

"Th. . . The King of the Sheep!" The mafioso screamed.

Almost at the same time as the mafioso jumped away, the boy kicked and broke the window.

A storm broke out in the plane.

The air was sucked out because of the pressure difference, and the aircraft shook violently. But the mafioso didn't mind the shaking or storms. He was crawling on the floor in an attempt to get away from the boy.

The boy stepped on his back.

"The Port Mafia's guns aren't enough to scare me."

The boy spoke in a pleased voice. A boy with red hair like a lion stood in a deep green rider suit.

The boy picked up a nearby chair with his bare hands. Then he threw the chair away. The chair stuck to the broken window and prevented the wind like a lid, causing the indoor storm to calm down.

"F...Forgive me!" The mafioso struggled under the boy's foot. "You guys... I apologize for ruining the sheep's territory! I had no choice!"

"Ahh, I guess you had no choice. Every single one of you shitty, Port Mafia bastards don't understand a thing. The guys who attack us 'sheep' always get a hundred-times retaliation. Don't worry, everyone other than you's already been killed. Trust me, you won't be going to your buddies alive."

The mafioso tried to reach for the gun that fell on the floor. He couldn't lift a single finger from the floor. On the contrary, his face was distorted and his bones squeezed into the floor, so he could only whisper. The boy was only lightly on his feet.

Gravity. Gravity on his own body had been increased by several times the normal amount.

"Nice. That's the Port Mafia for you." The boy said in a delighted voice. "Thinking of a counterattack while eating my gravity... That's fine, I dare you to. But before that, tell me one thing. Why did you hit our territory?"

"I didn't want to... attack!" The mafioso was forced to squeeze the air from his deformed lungs. "It was unavoidable... because my storage armory was destroyed... by the god of disaster. It was revived from hell...the black flame of Arahabaki...!"

"Arahabaki?"

The boy's smile disappeared.

His gravity weakened for just a moment.

At that time, the mafioso rolled away from the boy, grabbed the gun that had fallen on the floor, and aimed at the boy. It was a fluid action that only those who were used to handling guns could do.

The boy silently looked down at the mafioso with his hands in his pockets.

"Go ahead, shoot. Try it and see what happens."

"Die... King of the Sheep, Nakahara Chuuya!"

The mafioso pulled the trigger.

The expressionless boy made a half turn with his hands in his pockets and kicked the bullet.

Subsonic bullets collided with his toes.

A bullet that bounced back at the same speed stuck into the mafia man's throat. The man bled and loudly fell on his back.

The boy made a half turn and landed in his original location, then said.

"Port Mafia, I'll kill you all."

Phase.01

The man was in trouble.

Somehow or another, he was in trouble.

He gazed at the documents, took a hit from his cigarette, stood from the chair, stretched out, stared at the flock of numbers on the wall, squeezed with his fingers the area between his eyebrows, sat down, groaned like a dead cow, and picked up the papers again.

The smoke made meaningless geometric figures and disappeared in front of him.

"There's nothing... I can do about this."

The man had black hair that was neatly tucked behind his ears, a worn white coat, and edge torn sandals, with a stethoscope from his neck. Dark bags were visible under his eyes.

The man was a doctor.

In addition to that, he worked in a cluttered clinic. There was a stethoscope, medical chart, and books on the bookshelf. On the wall in front of the desk, there was a display case for hanging the X-ray film and observing them.

A doctor standing in a doctor's office.

But he wasn't a doctor, and it wasn't a doctor's office.

It was a place far from any hospital in the world.

"Our gun smugglers are two weeks behind schedule. Now, all our subordinates will be fighting against the enemy with kitchen knives. That's not all, three more violent cases have occurred in this month alone. The end members are out of control." The man said, looking at the documents.

The man is named Mori Ougai.

He was the leader of the mighty illegal organization, Port Mafia, and a new leader at that, who just took the position a year ago.

"Contract cancellation of protection business, intensifying competition with other organizations, shrunken territory... I'm stuck. There've been a lot of problems after only one year of being the boss. How difficult is it to stand at the top of an organization? ... I wonder if something's not right? What do you think, Dazai-kun? Are you listening to me?"

"I'm not listening."

"Why not?"

The answer to Mori Ougai's question came from a boy sitting on a medical stool on the other side of the room. He had black hair and wore white bandages around his forehead. He was a thin boy that was wearing a black suit too big for him.

Dazai Osamu— his age, 15 years old.

"Your stories are always so boring!" Dazai said, playing with a bottle of medical chemicals. "You've been chanting like a sutra recently. There's no money, no information, no trust from your subordinates. You knew from the start this would happen."

"Yes, but..." After scratching his head in a troubled manner, Mori said. "By the way, Dazai-kun. Why are you mixing the high blood pressure medicine and low blood pressure medicine from the medicine cabinet?"

"Huh? I thought it'd be amazing if I drank them together and died easily."

"You won't die!" Mori had dealt with a lot of medicine before. "Honestly... How did you unlock the medicine cabinet?"

"I want to die!" Dazai flapped his hands. "I'm so bored, I want to die! I want to die as easily and simply as possible! By any means, Mori-san!"

"If you're a good, mature kid, I'll teach you how to mix the back medicine."

"Lies! You already told me that. A year ago, *that* was the only thing that made me think so hard, and you still never told me! At this rate, I'll betray the organization."

"Stop talking about such ideas, you're a smart kid. If you betray them, you know you won't die easily." Mori had no choice but to laugh.

"Ah... I'm bored. This world is so boring."

Dazai hung his thin legs from the stool.

Dazai was not a subordinate of Mori, nor of the mafia. Of course, he was not a hidden child, an orphan, or a medical assistant. There was no word that accurately described the relationship between Dazai and Mori. If you dare prepare words that are close to reality, it was a fateful encounter.

"First of all, Dazai-kun," Mori sighed. "You are the only person who was there when I inherited the previous boss's title. You're a testimony of his will. I don't want you to die so easily."

It was a year ago that the two became destined collaborators. Mori, who was the chief physician, and Dazai, who was just an attempted suicide patient, had collaborated to carry out a secret operation: assassination of the head of the Port Mafia, a forgery of his will.

"You've made an error."

Dazai said in a strangely clear voice.

"What are you talking about?"

"It was smart of you to choose a suicidal patient as an accomplice. Even after a year, I am still alive. Thanks to you, the seeds of anxiety will not disappear."

For a moment, Mori felt like cold ice was being pressed against his internal organs.

"...What are you talking about?"

"I already know. There's a certain anxiety, anxiety about whether the previous boss's assassination was leaked to outsiders."

Dazai's expression was still unreadable. It was as quiet as a freezing lake.

"What do you mean I made an error?" Mori raised his eyebrows as if to justify. "There was nothing wrong with our plan. A year ago, I think you and I worked out a great strategy. I never want to do it again, though, because it was difficult."

"Your strategy is incomplete." Dazai said with cold eyes. "The strategy isn't complete until the person involved in the assassination and forgery's mouth is sealed. Right?"

Emotions waved violently inside Mori.

"...You are..."

The boy's gaze quietly penetrated Mori. Like a medical device that looked through the human body.

"In that respect, I was a suitable accomplice, because no one would doubt it after you become the next leader in my testimony—even if I have committed suicide of unknown motives."

The doctor and boy exchanged a silent gaze for a while. The Shinigami and the Devil seemed to glare at each other as the room filled with their spirit. In Mori's head, a word that he didn't know flickered many times and echoed like an alarm.

Miscalculation.

He made a miscalculation.

He missed the optimal solution.

This child should not have been chosen as an accomplice.

Dazai had no end. His nightmarish thoughts occasionally showed themselves through his sharp, observing eye. In this demonic nest called the mafia, he was like a frozen embodiment of cleverness.

"...Or something like that. It's fun to put admirable people on the spot with half-assed ideas. It's my recent entertainment." Dazai suddenly said with an absent-minded look on his face.

Mori quietly observed Dazai.

Just as you were beginning to think he was sharp, he immediately erased that cleverness. Right after it seemed as if nothing had been overlooked, he smoked his surroundings with an unclear and incomprehensible suicide addiction.

Although Mori had never imagined it until he became leader, his speech reminded him of a certain person.

"I know someone like you." Mori said without thinking.

"Who?"

Without answering Dazai's question, Mori gave a small smile and lowered his head slightly.

"Anyways, stop mocking adults. Me, silencing you? Don't make me laugh. If I was going to do that, I would have done it already. It's easier than breathing. How many times do you think I stopped your suicide this year? That's hard, you know. Have you done something similar to the hero of a movie and released a bomb under a chair?"

Dazai can't die.

Why?—If that happened, some people deep inside the organization would say "the previous boss's death was a conspiracy", and that would cause an uproar.

Already this year, two members had made an assassination plan for Mori. Of course, the traitors were executed, but you couldn't imagine how many supporters for the previous boss would not submit to Mori under the water.

So, Dazai couldn't die.

And over the past year, there was another reason why he should keep Dazai in hand and not let him die.

"Dazai-kun. If you want it that much, I can give you some medicine that will give you a comfortable death." Mori said, taking out a piece of paper from the desk drawer. He wrote the letters with a feather pen.

"Really?"

"But before that, I want to ask for a little investigation." Mori said while writing. "It's not a big job. There is no danger. But I can only ask you."

"Sounds sketchy." Dazai looked to Mori.

"Do you know about the mortar near the Yokohama settlements?" Mori ignored Dazai. "There are rumors that a certain person recently appeared in the vicinity. I want you to investigate the truth of the rumor. This is a delegation of authority called the Silver Oracle. If you show this, any mafia member will do anything you ask. Use it as you like."

Dazai looked at the paper then at Mori, and said. "Who is this person?"

"Take a guess."

Dazai sighed. "I don't want to think."

"That's fine."

Dazai stared at Mori with dark eyes for a while and then opened his heavy mouth.

"...There's no doubt that the mafia's highest authority is worried about the rumor of the city. It's an important rumor that can't be thrown away. And if it's a rumor bad enough to use the Silver Oracle, it's probably the rumors themselves, not the people spreading them. Rumors where the truth must be confirmed and the source must be crushed. Rumors that do harm just by spreading. And, if there is a reason to use me rather than an expert or an excellent subordinate, there can be only one person. What appeared was the previous boss?"

"Exactly." Mori was inwardly struck heavily. "There are people in this world who must not get up from the grave. I confirmed his death with this hand, and it was ugly."

Mori touched his fingertips.

The feeling of that moment still remained on his fingertip.

It felt like a huge tree was cut down. He's cut a lot of people at work so far, but there was no such heavy response from any previous surgery.

The previous boss's throat was cut with a surgical blade and assassinated. The cause of his death was hidden. Complications caused convulsions and they needed to secure his airway, and his throat was incised.

A 14-year-old boy was there. It happened in front of Dazai's eyes.

"A human who must not get up from the grave..."

Dazai said, and after a moment of silence, he stood up with a sigh that seemed inevitable.

"I can't ask anyone other than you." That's why Dazai took away the piece of paper that had been presented.

"Medicine. You promise? No matter what?" Mori smiled.

"This is your first job. Welcome to the Mafia." Dazai got up and walked towards the exit.

"Oh right, as I was saying... Who do you know who is like me?" Mori smiled a little. And he said with a vague sadness.

"Myself."

Mori thought.

What he needed was an assistant. He was a secretary, a sword, and an excellent right arm.

And above all, what you need to be a street doctor, a traitor, and a power snatcher is a trusted subordinate. A subordinate who does not need a

secret. A subordinate who understands himself, who keeps waving alone at the top of the iceberg.

A mistake called Dazai invited by Mori. But, errors are not always bad. He had picked him up as a disposable stone, but he turned out to be a diamond.

It may be a wish for him to take over this blood filled position. But, if it is Dazai, then—

"Dazai-kun," subconsciously, the question came out. "I don't know if I can understand it, but tell me—why do you want to die?"

Dazai looked back at Mori with a clear face, and said with the eyes of an innocent boy, "Tell me this. Do you really think that there's any value in the act of living?"

* * *

Suribachi¹ City was literally a city made up of a mortar-shaped hole. There was a huge explosion here, with a diameter of 2 km that blew away both the people and rights of the land. Later, only the bowl-shaped wilderness remained.

In the aftermath, people gathered and built a new town illegally. They were shaded people who had been kicked out of the surface society, or hadn't existed from the very beginning. They lost their right to live and were in a legally tensioned position. With these two backgrounds, they built huts that had floors and electrical wiring with their bare hands. Eventually, the hypocenter became a city where people who were betrayed by glory and jealousy lived. A gray city where gray people live.

Of course, it was a land where the government did not reach. A land for illegal organizations like the Mafia.

Dazai was walking downhill from Suribachi City.

"So, suicide by drinking a plating solution for painting is very popular in foreign countries, huh... I see."

Dazai was reading a book while walking with a serious look on his face.

¹ The kanji for Suribachi City means "mortar shaped city", hence why "literally" is used here

He was hidden from the people's line of sight.

"What's this? The reason for its popularity is simply because it is an easy-to-use chemical for industrial painters, and it is by no means an easy suicide method. Those who drink it will die fearfully for hours and in an intense pain while it melts the internal organs... Wow, I'm glad I didn't try it. "

Dazai looked up and spoke to the escort mafia walking behind him.

"Hey, did you know about that? Be careful when you commit suicide! Um..."

"Hirotsu." The escort mafia responded with a face like a troubled small dog. "Um... I'll keep that in mind."

He was an older gentleman, and his hair was black and white. He was a member of the Mafia who was nominated by Dazai because he was familiar with the upper land around this area, and was assigned the role of an escort guard without any further consent.

Dazai was a fifteen year old child who was outside the mafia, yet he had the Silver Oracle. Moreover, Dazai was the only person who saw the last of the predecessor with Mori. Mori ordered such a person to investigate secretly—Something didn't add up.

Dazai should not be trusted, or so Hirotsu's intuition was telling. Only those who have survived in this organization for many years would understand.

Hirotsu abided by Dazai this morning and let him take him.

They followed information where the previous boss was witnessed, from the slums to sightseeing spots, and from there asked about the rumored god from person to person. Although it was a strange investigation team of a child and a middle-aged man, Dazai's bizarre way of manipulating the other person's thoughts provided sighting information without them even realizing that they were talking about sightings. Even stubborn people changed their attitude as soon as they flickered a bundle of banknotes entrusted for the investigation from Mori.

Dazai heard what he needed from the people in the area and the two were on their way back to the Mafia headquarters.

"Um... Dazai-san. Don't go too far. Although I am an escort, this is an area of conflict. I don't know what will happen."

"Conflict?"

Hirotsu told him. "There are currently three organizations that are hostile to the Mafia. Takasekai, Gerhart Security Services, and the third organization is struggling in this area. There is no official organization name, there is only a simple street name of 'Sheep'. This week alone, two mafia teams have been killed. The leader is very annoying and rumors are that bullets don't work against him."

"Huh... It's no wonder the sound of explosions and shootouts from the other side was lively. Well, not that I care..." Dazai said in an uninterested voice.

At that time, an electronic sound rang from Dazai's pocket. A mobile phone.

"It's Mori." Dazai put the mobile phone to his ear. "Hello? Yeah, the interviews are complete. I learned a lot. Eh? What do you mean, how...I can at least do that much. Yes, based on the interviews," Dazai said. "It's the old boss. He was revived from the pits of hell, wrapped in black flame."

He heard a rising voice in the phone call saying 'What?'

"There were a lot of witnesses. I guess he wasn't done with this awful world." Dazai had a cruel smile. "Anyways, I'll head back and report in detail—"

The next moment, something hit Dazai's torso without any warning.

Dazai flew horizontally, like a petal in a gust of wind. A wooden hut broke as he went through the tin roof. While crushing through a fence, Dazai rolled down to the bottom of Suribachi.

"The 'Sheep'!" The cry of Hirotsu sounded far away. "Dazai-san!"

He rolled down the hill, broke through the huts, rolled up dirt and building debris, and stopped before long. He was on top of the roof of a simple building with plaster walls.

Something was on top of Dazai.

It was the same thing that hit Dazai a while ago and blew him away—a black figure.

"Hahaha! This is good!" He cried out. "It's a kid! The Port Mafia must be really desperate for people."

The shadow said.

It was a small figure, a boy in a dark green rider suit, like a spear in the dark. His age was almost the same as Dazai's.

"That hurt." Dazai was laid down on his back and replied. "I don't like pain, you know."

"I'll give you a choice, kid," said the boy in the rider suit, with his hands in his pockets. "Will you die now, or spit out the information and then die? Choose the one you like."

"Two choices, good. I'm thrilled." Dazai's voice remained flat despite being attacked by the enemy and hitting the ground and buildings. "Then kill me now."

The figure was silent for a moment.

Then he finally got a look at Dazai, and realized that he was dealing with a person with personality. "Huh. I thought you were going to cry and run away, but you're a surprisingly radical kid."

"You're a kid, too."

"Sure, everyone who fights me says that at first, but they immediately notice their mistake. I'm not just a kid, unlike you." The boy in the rider suit put power into his legs. "Now, let's talk. You're investigating Arahabaki. Tell me everything you know."

The boy stomped Dazai's fist that was full of wounds. Dazai's bones pressed against his shoe.

"...Ah. Arahabaki, huh. I see... Arahabaki."

Dazai said, looking at his stepped fist like it was someone else's.

"You've heard of it?"

"Nope."

Dazai said plainly.



The boy laughed at him and quickly kicked up Dazai's body. His toes hit the bone, causing him to cry out.

Dazai groaned in pain.

"Okay then. Do you want to try the record? The longest is nine times. No one would be able to keep silent, even if I kicked them more than that."

Dazai said, grimacing from the pain, "If I talk about the information... will you release me?"

"Oh, I'm kind to weak guys"

Dazai was silent, thinking a little. Then he looked at the boy and said with a serious face.

"I understand... let's talk," Dazai continued in a heavy, tense voice. "You should drink a little more milk. You're too short."

The boy's kick pierced Dazai's torso. Dazai fell from the roof and rolled, crashing into the fence of another building.

"That kind of help isn't necessary, you dumb bastard!" The boy shouted. "I'm 15 years old, I'm still growing!"

"Fufu... I'll give you a curse. I'm also 15 years old, but I'll continue to grow and you won't grow much."

"There won't be an annoying curse!" The toe of the boy approached Dazai and kicked him in the face.

"It... hurts." Dazai said, laughing thinly. His mouth seemed to be cut, and a bit of blood flowed from the edge of his lips. "But I remember now. 'Sheep' ... This is a mutual aid group that was built only by minors and created a great force in Yokohama. Boys and girls gathered to defend themselves against looting, fighting and raids. Its organizational strategy is thorough defense. But few people now fight the sheep. The reason is simple: anyone who invades the territory of the sheep will surely have a tremendous counterattack later, by a boy who is the leader of the Sheep. I see. Are you Chuuya Nakahara, the King of Gravity?"

"I'm not a king," said the boy called Nakahara Chuuya, with a hard voice. "I hold my own and I'm strong. I'm just doing my responsibility." Chuuya looked down at Dazai. "You, you know a lot about the inside of the Sheep."

"A long time ago, I was invited to join the Sheep. Of course, I refused."

"Good decision. If you were in the same organization as me, I would have killed you in 5 minutes."

"I would have assassinated you before that."

Chuuya glared at Dazai and Dazai looked back at Chuuya.

Eventually, Chuuya got off of Dazai and stepped back several steps.

"Well, your fate of being kicked and killed in five minutes doesn't change. Anyway, I'm sure I can pull whatever information I want from you. I'll send your head to the office of the mafia as a signal to declare war."

"You can't kill me." Dazai didn't relax and just quietly looked back at Chuya. "Can't you hear the footsteps?"

"Footsteps?"

At that time, a roar was heard from all directions.

"Don't move!"

A muzzle was aimed at Chuuya. Rifles, pistols, submachine guns, a shotgun, and more mechanical handguns. Countless mafiosi and countless firearms.

"Haha!" Chuya looked around. "Interesting. I'm more popular than I thought I was. I was sure no one would come to help."

"Surrender, boy." From the back of the mafia siege, Hirotsu appeared and said with a quiet voice, "At that young of age, you don't want to know the color of your organs."

"No matter how terrible it may be, I'm not scared, old man. Guns don't work on me. Everyone just gets knocked down and goes home."

Hirotsu looked down at Chuuya with a quiet expression.

"How nostalgic... I was like you at some point, when I thought that I could blindly believe in power and be able to break the world with my dormitory alone." He gave a small laugh. "Guns don't work? That ability is not so unusual. Now then... Warning time is over. Now's the time of regret. You should regret your own thoughts and ignorance in a pool of blood."

Hirotsu took a big step and his shoes echoed around them.

Those eyes were colder than a Shinigami's.

"You're an ability user, too?" Chuuya's eyes became sharp. "How nice, those eyes. They look different from the other guy's so far.... Come on."

Chuuya got into a fighting stance with his hands still in his pocket.

"Hirotsu-san... It's better to stop." Dazai said, grimacing in pain. "This guy manipulates the gravity of the object he touches. Your abilities aren't compatible."

"Hm. Gravity?" Hirotsu said, taking off his white gloves. The gesture even had the elegance of nobility. "Alright, Sheep kid. I'll tell you my ability, to be fair. My ability generates strong repulsion on the things I touch with my palm."

"Saying your ability, that's a mafioso with fair play." Chuuya laughed. "But don't expect respect for the old age over here."

"I'm so worried."

Hirotsu threw white gloves in a random direction.

By the time Chuuya lightly cleared them away, Hirotsu had already jumped in towards his breast. He grabbed Chuuya's neck with his left hand and pulled. Chuuya didn't oppose the force, and instead kicked the ground and half-turned his body, striking the right hand of Hirotsu. Chuuya twisted in the air and released a horizontal kick. Hirotsu's right hand came back and clashed with Chuuya's shoes.

Gravity and repulsion collided and flashed.

Without countering the impact, Chuuya flew backwards and landed lightly like a feather.

"That's the mafia for you... That said, you can't do anything. Your ability is far too incompatible against mine, old man."

Chuuya's ability manipulates the gravity of the touched object. Gravity is usually downwards 1G towards the Earth. However, Chuuya's ability was to change the direction and force of gravity as long as the object touched was somewhere on their body.

On the other hand, Hirotsu can only apply a force opposite to the contact surface of the object touched with the palm of his right hand. The two abilities were completely incompatible with each other.

But even so, Hirotsu's expression hadn't changed.

"You don't need to worry, you're young. The strength of your abilities will decide who wins or loses—I believed that when I was young. I was fortunate to notice my mistake without paying the price of my life. In that sense, I'm sorry for you."

Chuya laughed at him. "Interesting."

This time, Chuuya rushed to Hirotsu.

With his hand in his pocket, Chuuya kicked up with a slanted posture. Hirotsu's right hand received it, just before his foot changed its orbit. Chuuya attacked Hirotsu with a downwards kick, aiming at the neck.

Hirotsu took out a pistol with his left hand and defended his neck. The kick, which became heavy by gravity, made the barrel shatter.

Chuuya kicked Hirotsu's right shoulder and held him down, while Hirotsu grabbed Chuuya's shoulder.

"I caught you."

"So what? Your ability won't work."

"I wonder."

Chuuya turned around with a surprised face. Dazai was standing behind his back, just after he landed. He put his hand on Chuuya's neck.

"Too bad. Gravity is now off your hands."

Dazai's ability was also only triggered if the subject is touched. His ability blocks and negates the triggering of all abilities—the ultimate anti-ability. There was no exception to the invalidation.

"The ability... will leave?" Hirotsu's right hand was gently applied to Chuuya's chest.

"Now, boy... Time for you to regret."

A white shockwave lit up around them.

Chuuya's light body flew backwards. As if repelled by a large car.

Almost at the same time—Dazai was also blown away and rolled on the ground. He clashed with the tin wall behind them and finally stopped.

"Dazai-san!"

For a moment, confusion spread across Hirotsu's face. Only Chuuya was supposed to be blown away by his ability. Why was Dazai also blown away?

"He... got me." Dazai whispered on his belly. "Just before the impact... I was kicked as he was turning his lower body. Thanks to that I released my hand ... That ability caused him to fly backwards."

The blown away Chuuya landed sideways on the wall of the building. A smile of the beast was on his mouth.

"Hahaha! Yes, that's it! Let's give fireworks suitable for the opening of a party!"

At the same time as his screaming, Chuuya flew at a speed that broke through the walls. He rushed straight towards Dazai and the others.

Chuuya rushed with the speed and weight of an empty shell. It was impossible to block it with only Hirotsu's right hand. Even if Dazai invalidated his ability, there was not much he could do against the speed of Chuuya, which was enough to break a human body.

The next moment, a black flame blew everyone away horizontally.

"Gah?!"

A black shock wave struck from the side and swept everyone's body sideways. Not just the human bodies: buildings, utility poles, and even trees were blown away. It was as if the air itself bore its fangs of anger against humanity and wiped everything off the ground.

It was a black explosion near the center of Suribachi City.

Though, it wasn't just an explosion. A huge hot fireball swallowed the whole area. Dazai, who was blown away like a dead leaf, saw it over a rotating field of view.

A pair of eyes that shone red with death and violence that had been carved for decades and white hair. Even in the black flame, he stood like the lord of hell, wearing the flame like a cloak.

That appearance—

"—The previous boss—" Dazai cried.

His cries were engulfed in flames—Dazai's consciousness disappeared into the dark.

Phase.02

"Welcome to the Port Mafia, Nakahara Chuuya-kun."

Mori spoke at the office desk on the top floor of the Mafia Building. It was a dim and spacious room with a shielded window controlled by electricity. The boss's office was one of the most difficult places to invade in Yokohama. In the middle, Chuuya happily stood facing Mori.

"I'm honored to have been invited by you."

Chuuya was detained. Both hands were handcuffed, both arms were tied up with leather restraints, and both legs were covered with large chains made to tow ships. Steel wires used for construction work were wrapped around his ankles and fixed to the metal fittings on the floor. His fist was covered with a steel cage so that it could never be opened again. In addition, countless red cubes appeared to surround the fuselage. It was an ability; a subspace constraint to bind Chuuya.

The ability's power was due to the gifted escort who stood next to Chuuya. However, even with such heavy restraints, the gifted escort was still nervous. He concentrated all his nerves to react immediately in case Chuuya showed even the slightest sense of rebellion. He was a skilled ability user in the mafia, but there was no room for error.

"I heard you put on quite the show yesterday." Mori smiled over the desk. "An all-round slaughter against our subordinates. As expected from the head of the Sheep."

"Not for long before someone got in my way. Unfortunately." Chuya smiled with a generous expression. "I'm sure you brought me here in regards to that, right? The black explosion from then—about the black flame of Arahabaki."

At that time, the entrance door opened.

"Excuse me... Oh?"

It was Dazai who showed his face.

"Hey, Dazai-kun. I've been waiting for you."

"Ah! It's the beanpole² from before!" Chuuya tried to jump up. "How dare you show yourself!"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm glad you're as full of energy as ever. I'm injured pretty badly over here, as you can see. Is your vitality the only thing that grows? Or is it thanks to your nutrition only going to your brain and not your height?"

Dazai had a bandage around his head and his right arm was secured with a plaster band. He was injured during the battle with Chuuya and the explosion that followed.

"Don't talk about my height!"

"Ok, I understand... It was low of me to raise the physical defects of others. I won't bring it up again, so please forgive me, Chibikko-kun."

"You bastard!"

"Alright, that's enough." Mori clapped his hands. "You only met yesterday, and yet you're such good friends. Now then... Just like Chuuya-kun said, I'd like to talk about the black explosion. Can you release him, Randou-kun?"

² I'm almost positive this phrase was in reference to Dazai's figure and how skinny he is, so he's comparable to a "withering/dead tree" (枯木). I used the literal translation before, but for now, we'll say beanpole. Tbh, I go back and forth

A gifted escort called Randou—a man with long, wavy black hair and unhealthy eyes—had a gloomy face.

"You're the leader... But I don't recommend it. This boy is dangerous..."

"No worries. Dazai-kun's nullifying ability will come in handy, and you look colder than usual. Your complexion looks bad. Are you ok?"

When asked, Randou shuddered. "I'm embarrassed to admit... that I'm going to freeze and die..."

"Cold?" Chuuya lifted his eyebrows and looked at Randou. "Dressed like that in this season?"

Randou was dressed in thick insulating fabric. He was wearing a brushed winter jacket, and a thick, muffler scarf around his neck. He wore ear warmers around his head, winter boots made of synthetic leather, and a dozen of heated hoodies were stuck to his whole body.

Still, he was quite cold.

"Since I was invited to the office, I dressed quite lightly so I wouldn't be rude... Brr, it's so cold..."

"According to the results of the examination, Randou-kun is not physically sick and has no problems with his nervous system. He just really hates the cold."

"Brr... I want to work in a warm area... Boss, is there a branch of the Port Mafia near a crater..?"

"There aren't."

"Hmm... Then, sorry for bringing it up. Please excuse me." Randou lifted his ability. The countless cubic subspaces that bound Chuuya disappeared. Then, with light footsteps, Randou left the room. The three had, for whatever reason, watched him until he was out of sight.

"He may not look like it, but he's a Port Mafia executive and an excellent ability user," Mori said quickly.

"No one can really say anything..." Chuuya muttered.

"Mori-san, why don't we get to business already?" Dazai said in exasperation.

"Ah—" Mori scratched his cheeks and lifted a quill pen off his desk. "—you're right." He looked at the ceiling, then at Dazai, then at Chuuya, then at his palm, and said, "Chuuya, are you willing to join the Mafia?"

The floor shattered with a roar. Radial cracks ran through the floor around Chuuya. "...Huh?" Chuuya's voice sounded like it arrived from the bottom of Hell. The reinforced flooring that could withstand shootouts was broken, and debris scattered through the room. Still, both Dazai and Mori remained expressionless without moving so much as an eyebrow. "Did you call me here to spout such shit?"

"Well, that's about the reaction I expected." Mori looked at Chuuya as if he had seen an unfavorable medical examination. "But in my view, our purpose and what you're following are somewhat consistent. Even after we evaluate what we can offer each other, I don't think it'll be too late."

"Haha, well that's surprising. The new boss of the Mafia is wasting his time." Chuuya laughed with his lips pulled sideways. It was a smile that seemed to sink into the opponent's flesh. "Me joining the mafia? What you mafia did to this city... don't say you forgot."

"The previous boss's rampage. That time had also caused me pain." Mori said with an unclear face.

The runaway of the previous boss—the violence and fear of Yokohama that has long been trapped under a bloody tyranny—is still a new tragedy in everyone's memory.

One day, all the redhead boys in the city were killed, just because one red-haired boy doodled on the boss's car.

One day, all residents in one housing complex died from poison being thrown into a water tank, just because hostile executives were a little more likely to be hidden in those apartments.

And one day, a mafioso who bad-mouthed the Port Mafia tried to give a touch of death to a whole neighborhood. To make matters worse, a medal of honor was given to those who betrayed the other bad-mouthers.

For this reason, the entire city was covered with suspicion and darkness, just like a medieval witch trial, for years. In the city of betrayal, the number of trivial executions was no less than the Chiba people. There seemed to be many examples of killing for false charges.

If they go against you, kill them.

Even if they disagree with you, kill them all.

A night tyrant and its death soldier.

That was the synonym for the Port Mafia.

"But the previous boss also died of disease. I was there when he passed... If there were rumors that such a bloody rule has returned, we must find the truth about it. Wouldn't you be worried, otherwise, too?" Chuuya didn't answer immediately and struck Mori with a knife-like eye. He opened his mouth.

"But even if that's the case... It's not a reason for you to push me around, street doctor. There are a lot of bad rumors about you, too. The truth is, the previous boss wasn't sick and you killed him. Right? Who could believe that he said, in his final moments, he'd give his position to a mere doctor? If that's not true, then prove it. Can you prove that you're not empowering that Shinigami through your need for power? Can you?"

The previous boss being killed by Mori was a secret in the organization. No one other than Dazai knows the truth. "I can't prove it. Why?" Mori said, shrugging his shoulders. Dazai quickly saw the change in Mori's expression and opened his mouth to stop him. But before he could, Mori said, "Because I did kill the previous boss."

The room temperature seemed to drop a few degrees. For the first time since arriving there, Chuuya was at a loss for words.

"I cut the throat of the great predecessor with a surgical blade and disguised it as if he was sick and died. What of it?" Mori's voice was calm and his posture wasn't different from his previous facial expression. But the person standing there was like a completely different person. Even the undefeated Chuuya was overpowered under his freezing eyes. Behind the desk was a demon that devoured demons, a god of death that killed the reaper, an incarnation of wickedness that wandered aimlessly and showed signs of cruelty through vast amounts of deaths.

"Seriously...?" Chuuya said with a hard voice. "I'm amazed to hear what this timid street doctor can do... Compared to this, the previous boss was just a bad kid."

"I'm honored to be complimented." Mori gave a gentle smile, like the one he'd give to a patient. "Chuuya-kun, I will withdraw my previous statement of joining the Mafia. Instead, I would like to offer a joint investigation. The rumors we've heard about the previous boss's return and the 'Arahabaki' that you're after are clearly rooted in the same incident. I think we could achieve a mutually beneficial relationship simply by sharing information, don't you think?"

"....And if I refuse?"

"I'll kill you." Mori said with a natural tone, like the moment when sugar is put into coffee. "Though it's hard to kill you, even in the Mafia. So I'll kill all your companions in the 'Sheep'. How about it?"



Chuuya's restraints flew away.

The metal restraints hit the walls and ceiling due to the physical strength of Chuuya's ability. "I'll kill you!" Chuuya jumped. He closed the distance between Mori in an instant and raised his right fist. Before his first could collide—it stopped. In front of a smiling Mori, there was a black communications device that he had raised in advance.

"Hey... Chuuya! Help me! Are you there?" A young voice was heard from the device. *"We're surrounded by the Mafia! Do something, quickly! Hey! You can do it, you always do...!"* When Mori pressed a button, the call was interrupted. Chuuya's fists trembled.

"It was really easy. Even though they were armed with guns, their skills were really poor." Mori shrugged. "The 'Sheep'... A counterattack organization with territory in a prime location in Yokohama. But the other members are ordinary children with guns." Chuuya's fists trembled harder, but he remained stationary in his spot and didn't move. He couldn't move. "As a fellow leader, I feel for you, Chuuya-kun. The 'Sheep', a mighty armed organization, was actually just a king with absolute strength and a herd of herbivores that depended on him. I think there are more things I can advise you about running an organization."

"... You bastard..." Chuuya clenched his teeth.

"What's wrong? What's that fist for? Good exercise for your health?" Mori showed a cool face and looked at Chuuya's raised fist. Some time passed, and eventually, Chuuya slowly lowered his fist.

"And there you have it, Dazai-kun." Mori smiled. "The wielder of the greatest violence in this room is Chuuya-kun. But for the Mafia, violence is just one tool at our disposal. The essence of the Mafia is to control rational action by a plethora of means. In this case, the rational action is to adjust the disadvantages caused by the hostile force into our profit. That's one of the rules of the Mafia."

"I see. But why did you teach me such a lesson?"

"Why indeed." Mori watched Dazai with an ambiguous smile. Chuuya listened to the conversation between the two with an expression of a beast that breaks and eats the meat. However, he did not take action, and opened his mouth instead.

"That was done so that the disadvantages exceed the profit." Chuuya glared at Mori. "We can exchange information. For the good of my profit—but you speak first. I will decide after hearing that."

"Sure thing." Mori said with a smile. "First, we are investigating rumors that the dead boss has appeared. According to Dazai-kun's investigation, three times in the last month the appearance of the previous boss has been witnessed in the vicinity of Suribachi City. The fourth time—he appeared in front of you and blew you away with a black flame. It's quite a destined story. Do you know anything about it?"

Mori looked at Chuuya. After crushing Mori under his sharp gaze, Chuuya said, "The dead can't come back to life."

"I think so too. If they could, all the doctors would be unemployed. But... I can't say that anymore. Look at this." Mori opened the office desk drawer with a key and took out a video terminal about the size of a palm from the inside. He put it on the desk and turned it on. Video feed was projected on the terminal. It was indoor footage from somewhere. The position of the video looked down from the ceiling, and a huge amount of bundled bills were stacked on the floor and against the wall.

"This is a video of a vault in the Port Mafia headquarters building, where half of the Port Mafia's hidden assets are kept. This is one of the most difficult places to enter, along with the boss's office—I want you to look ahead." Mori pointed.

A figure moved slowly between the bills. Dazai took a breath when he saw the figure. "... No way."

The shadow looked at the monitoring device. It was an old man who wore a black dress and floated in the air. A night tyrant with flames in his eyes. The old man—the previous boss, opened his mouth to the surveillance device as if he saw the reaction of Dazai and the others watching the video.

"I've been revived." The voice was low and strangely broken. Despite the sound from the terminal, the room temperature seemed to drop a little. "From the fire of hell. Do you know why, doctor?"

The previous boss in the screen was swaying a little and the figure was not constant. The outline swung like a flame.

"For anger. A wrath of regret. He feeds on anger. He brought me back from the world of hell with the intention to spread more anger. The beast of the God's with a mighty power, Arahabaki of the black flames—he is the anger of this world. As he wishes, I will perform revenge here and sway further anger. To the one who killed me—from today on, you will tremble in your sleep."

Immediately after he said that, a huge flame erupted from the body of the previous boss. The bills burned up in an instant, the wall material melted, and the video feed went black.

The monitoring device stopped. Even after the screen dimmed, no one could say a word.

"That's all the content left in the surveillance footage." Mori said, turning off the video terminal. "For now, only the security officer, one executive, and myself know of this video. I've forbidden anyone from saying it outside, but that could be useless. There's no guarantee that the previous boss won't give the same speech elsewhere."

Dazai gave Mori a hard expression. "What if I started going around telling this to everybody?"

"Take a guess. In the video he says his cause of death was not sickness, but assassination. If that information is known to the previous boss's supporters, as a worse case, 30% of the organization will turn to my enemies." Dazai kept silent and stared at the black screen with a thoughtful expression. "Chuuya-kun. You first asked Dazai-kun what he knew about Arahabaki. What is Arahabaki?"

Chuuya glanced at Mori, but didn't say anything.

"I also looked around a little bit. Arahabaki is a traditional genus of a god. An old god before Japanese mythology. But, since it's so old, its identity isn't clear. No one really knows what characters to write. That's why there is a unique tradition depending on the land, and various types of 'Arahabaki gods' that are spoken."

"Do you believe in the existence of a thing like god?" Chuuya said, as if he was talking to a fool.

"No. I only believe in what I saw. And as you have seen, the person in the video was the previous boss. That fact cannot be changed." Mori shook his head. "It's no coincidence that you were investigating Arahabaki. You probably heard the same rumors that we did and were chasing the truth."

Chuuya looked around the room and hesitated, but eventually opened his mouth. "I don't know if this is true. It's a place with a lot of travelers, so I can't find the source of the rumor. But... Have you heard how Suribachi City was made?"

"Suribachi City?" Mori lifted his eyebrows at the unexpected question. "That would be the city with the hypocenter. At the end of the war, an unexplained great explosion occurred, and everything on the ground was blown away. It's a city that was built on ruins—"

"The cause of the explosion was Arahabaki." Chuuya grimaced. "There are a lot of rumors in the 'Sheep'... According to the rumors, an overseas soldier who was taken prisoner eight years ago was tortured at a secret military facility near the hypocenter. The torturer messed up and killed him. But the dead soldier woke up Arahabaki with anger and resentment, and was revived with a black flame... By the way, the only thing in Hell that can wake up Arahabaki are the people who killed people in his life, the countless souls of the dead, or those who died with great anger... The soldier who was revived blew away the hated enemy soldiers, the soldiers of this country, together with the facilities. The explosion was the result."

"That's why it's called Suribachi City." Mori said in fascination.

"Yeah. However, the power of Arahabaki was too much for one person. Before long, it blew away both reason and personality, became an uncontrollable monster, burned up his body with the ground and evaporated."

"Now it's the return of an angry god. What do you think, Dazai-kun?"

"What do I think? Nothing." Dazai shrugged. "There's no reason behind it. A grudge, the souls of the dead, it's too unbelievable. It's a horror story somebody came up with."

Mori opened his mouth with a cautious look. "But... the previous boss also killed many people before his death, and died with a great amount of anger. The conditions have been met. Not to mention, the fact that the previous boss gave the name 'Arahabaki' in the vault is hard to deny. It's impossible for a normal person to break into the highest security vault."

"Then the answer is obvious. It's an ability. The video was made by an ability user we don't know. And then, with the rumors of Arahabaki, disguised the previous boss's resurrection."

"What for?"

"It's been decided. Let everyone believe that Mori-san assassinated the previous boss—to crush the Mafia."

"Good grief." Mori shook his head with a tired face. "That's why it takes two people to kill a person. Dazai-kun, I'm putting you in command. Find the culprit before they give the same speech on the video about the previous boss. Sound good?"

"Well... If anyone finds out about the previous boss, I'll be tortured too, as Mori-san's accomplice, so I'll do it." Dazai said with a dissatisfied face. "I don't have much time, and I don't think I can do it alone."

"Alone? You won't be alone." Mori grinned with laughter. "Please have Chuuya-kun over there help you."

"Huh?!" The two shouted at the same time.

"What kinda bullshit are you saying, I'll blow—"

"No way, no way in hell, why should I have to go—"

"—you to pieces, don't fuck around with that kinda talk—"

"—with a guy like him, I'd be better off on my own—"

"—you bastard!"

"Both of you stop shouting." Mori said, looking at them at the same time. "Chuuya-kun. I trust you understand that you're not in a position to refuse orders?"

"That's low, Mori-san—"

"You can't just do whatever you like, you octopus!"

"—even for you!"

"Don't fuck with me!"

"Whatever."

Even as they screamed at the same time, Mori simply smiled and didn't do anything. "There are several reasons for pairing you two. First, it's a rumor that is hostile against the Mafia, so it's easier for non-mafia people to hear. Although it's necessary to monitor Chuuya-kun so he doesn't betray the

investigation, Dazai-kun's disabling ability is compatible with yours. And finally, the most important reason is..." Dazai and Chuuya got together and waited for the rest of what Mori was going to say. However, after rolling the words around in his mouth a bit, he smiled and said, "It's a secret."

"What the hell!"

"Well, think of it as an adult intuition." Mori had a mysterious smile. "Both of you can't do this unless you get along. This is an order. If I hear of a report that the mission was neglected because of a misunderstanding... Do you understand?" Mori smiled slowly and looked at them. An invisible cold spread around. "What do you say?"

Silence.

"What do you say?"

"...Yes sir." Came the bitter reply from the two boys.

"Ok, then go. I'm hoping for a good report." Mori quietly watched Dazai and Chuuya walk away, hindering each other's path. Eventually the door closed and Mori was left alone in the room. The tranquility of the sea after a storm passed over the room. Mori stood alone, staring at the door.

"Is it only possible for a diamond to polish a diamond?" Mori smiled, looking back at his memory. "Natsume-sensei, the words Fukuzawa and I told you, I will confirm it this time."

* * *

A pale sky spread over Yokohama. It was a pleasant sky that made everyone want to take a deep breath while looking up. But, some people who saw that sky had different opinions. It's too pale, or it's too transparent. With this, when the flame of destruction burned on the ground, the black smoke would be engraved vividly in the sky.

And that black smoke was about to rise.

Dazai and Chuuya began to reluctantly investigate, to find and extinguish the fire that would cause black smoke. There wasn't much time left. They were walking along an alley under a quiet, sunny sky with grumpy faces, no words, and a distance of about 5 meters between them. Dazai in front, with

Chuuya behind him. No one would think they were walking together because of their distance.

"...Hey." Chuuya said in a small voice. Dazai walked forward without a reply. He didn't look back.

"Hey!" Chuuya called out again. "Tell me where we're going."

"Wow, the weather is nice. It's almost as if I can hear a fairy because the weather is so nice."

"Don't play around. It's my voice." Dazai looked back.

"Oh, you were there? Sorry, but would you mind not talking to me? I'm too busy breathing right now."

"I'll rip your throat out, bandage freak. Why don't you tell me where we're going?"

"I got it, I'll answer. If I answer, though, will you stay away from me? I can't think when I'm walking with you."

"Don't worry. I also can't think when I'm around you."

"Fufu, looks like we'll get along. It must be because I love you!"

"Ugh, stop it! That's so sick I could die!"

"...Yeah, I think I'd also feel sick and die." Dazai groaned with a look of regret and said, without looking at Chuuya, "What was it? Oh, right, the place we're heading to now. The next thing we are going to investigate is the person who heard and witnessed the most recent explosion."

"Asking around? What a pain... What will asking the enemy do?"

"It won't be." Dazai saw Chuuya's disgusted face. "First of all, what caused the explosion? Looking into it, it's the sighting of the previous boss." Dazai looked at Chuuya's face for a while, then opened his mouth. "It's not the rumors about the previous boss, it's the rumors about Arahabaki's body. If the revived boss is disguised as an ability user, then the ability user will be playing the role of Arahabaki. It is inevitable that the criminal impersonator will breathe, eat, and live. I'm going to chase him."

Chuuya frowned. "But... if the rumors about Arahabaki are true, my Sheep friends will be investigating."

Dazai laughed at him. "No matter how much the Sheep love rumors, there are some people who can't listen." He turned back to the front and said again while walking, "A week ago, the same explosion we experienced happened. The place was the same, Suribachi City. I was late to notice because the appearance of the previous boss himself was not witnessed, but it's the same incident we are following. So, we are going to talk to the survivor of that explosion."

"The survivor... there were casualties?"

"Ah, a group of Mafia. The one who survived is an ability user, and you've already met him. His home's up ahead, I promised to listen there—" When Dazai pointed at the end of the alley, a roar rang from that direction to respond.

"Hah?!" Chuuya was surprised when he saw the cause of the roar.

"...Ah—" Dazai looked troubled. "Now, it's the sound of an explosion." Black smoke rose from the place that had exploded. Gunshots were faintly heard.

"Hey, hey. Weren't you going to talk over there?"

"I wonder if the criminal has gone ahead."

"Oh, that's not good. That looks dangerously crucial."

Dazai looked at Chuuya. Against Dazai's expectations, Chuuya's expression was shining.

"In other words, this is the place? Isn't this a change from listening to trouble to dealing with a criminal who came to seal him up?"

"Huh...?"

"Isn't this great? Let's hurry up and go!"

After he was done talking, Dazai watched Chuuya sprint away like the wind, with no expression on his face. "...What a child..."

* * *

About half of the mansion was blown away. It was a Western-styled mansion with ivy wrapped around it. Half of the right side of the mansion was a well-maintained antique house, while half of the left side was a pile of black rubble. The rubble had smoldering embers that raised gray smoke. Because the mansion was in the back of a planted forest away from the residential area, there were no injuries or spectators. Instead, there were seven or eight people with guns. They were holding rifles at the mansion, and occasionally a dry gunshot sounded.

"It's starting." Dazai said while hiding behind the trees in the forest. "A flashy explosion mark. If I was in the middle of that explosion, I wonder if I would have died without suffering..."

"Yeah yeah, I'll kill you later, so concentrate on work right now." Chuuya looked at Dazai with disgust in his eyes and turned his line of sight back to the mansion. "It's a raid from an armed organization. Eight enemies are outside. I don't know if there are any more inside."

Immediately after Chuuya said that, the walls of the building blew away with a shattering noise. An armed man from the inside broke through the plastered wall on the second floor. He seemed to have been blown away by someone.

"Ah... Well, that level of armament against Randou-san's ability wouldn't do anything." Dazai said with a tedious voice.

"Randou?"

"The Mafia's ability user we were going to hear from. The guy with the ability that restrained you in the boss's office. The cold one."

"Him?" Chuuya had a strained face. "Are we going to help?"

"Even if we went, we don't know the opponent's affiliation and strategy..."

At that time, a gun being raised sounded behind them.

"Let me tell you." It was a man's voice. It was a gentle voice, like a death's kiss. "Raise both of your hands and turn around."

Dazai and Chuuya looked at each other for a moment before raising their hands and turning around. Standing behind them was a man in a dark gray field uniform. He was a massive man, like a big tree. He pointed a handgun at Dazai.

"What, it's just a kid?" The man holding the handgun said with a surprised voice. "Is this really a reinforcement unit? Is the mafia short on manpower, or is that Randou just really popular?"

"I-, I'm-, I'm so sorry! We're just... kids from the neighborhood!" Dazai trembled and shouted in fear. "We were on the way to Randou's house for a delivery, but..."

"Hey, old man." Chuuya interrupted Dazai's remarks with a pleased voice. "Let's save each other time. You shoot one shot at me. Then, I will blow you into the next town as my counterattack. Next, I'll blow away the remaining attackers. That attack is open. How about it?"

"What the hell?" He aimed the gun at Chuuya.

"... Ahh, enough." Dazai stopped trembling and shook his head while covering his face. "Even though I went through the great trouble of acting to trick him into giving us information..."

"What's wrong? You don't shoot kids?" Chuuya got as close to the handgun as he could and looked up at the muzzle. "But if you live in this world, then you know that you shouldn't judge an enemy solely on appearances. Based on your equipment, you're the GSS tactics team, right?"

The man pulled a face.

GSS, that is, Gerhard Security Service, is one of the illegal organizations that is against the mafia. It was originally a genuine private security company with an overseas capital, but it was made illegal after receiving aid from their home country, and now they're involved not only in ensuring security, but also in creating danger. Generally speaking, they're 'pirates'. They make contracts with corporations and attack cargo ships. However, security companies that have not allied with GSS are not attacked. Something about their bad reputation immediately gives customer acquisitions publicity, therefore killing two birds with one stone for their business partners. And with how many times the Port Mafia's goods sunk, the two organizations were now in a very brutal relationship. Because their training instructor is a true soldier, the members' combat skills are high, and the mafia was struggling.

"Look out, I shoot quickly!" Chuuya laughed and pushed his forehead against the muzzle.

The man put his finger on the trigger to shoot, but he couldn't. The muzzle slowly descended.

"What... the gun, it's heavy..."

"Don't get tired over this heavy weight. Are you a boy?" Chuuya gently touched the gun. With that, the lightweight handgun became unusually heavy and fell on the man's hand as if it had been turned into a huge iron block.

When Chuuya lightly touched the handgun, the handgun suddenly fell sideways on the man's chest. With the weight of a canon, the pistol digs into the man's bulletproof vest.

His ribs creaked on impact.

The man screamed.

The handgun fell by the man's foot with a light noise after pinning down his chest. The weight from before disappeared when Chuuya moved his hand away.

"A child who manipulates the others' gravity... The Sheep's, Nakahara Chuuya...?" The man whispered while holding his chest. "Then the rumor that you fell to the mafia is true!"

The man released his fist with an angry voice. He rotated his lower back to close the distance between them and thrust it into Chuuya.

"...Huh?"

A black whirlwind struck into the man's chin faster than the soldier could hit Chuuya. Chuuya's gleam dug into him like a hammer. Chuuya jumped up and hit him directly with a backwards, high-speed kick.

"No one fell under the Mafia's umbrella. Don't make me angry with such a misunderstanding, idiot."

The man fell on his back. He had concussed and fainted. He won't be waking up.

"Oh, well done." A dry applause rose. "It's much quicker to kick the enemy in a freestyle rotation instead of in a straight line."

Chuuya's ability maneuvers gravity. That operation covers not only the touched object, but also Chuuya's own body. Decrease your gravity and lighten yourself while attacking at high speed, then return to normal only at the moment you make an impact. By doing so, kicks released at the speed of a feather are pierced by the heavy weight of an iron ball.

"You were only watching, you useless bandaged bastard."

"Unlike you elementary school students who are proud of their violence, I was taking information from the enemy communications."

Dazai had an enemy communications device in his ear. It was taken from the man's pocket.

"According to the communicator, when they heard the scream of the person you just blew up, the remaining people rushed out to support him."

At the same time as Dazai finished, about ten figures appeared. Figures with a gun. They spread out to half enclose Dazai and Chuuya, and pointed their rifles at them.

"Hey, bandaged bastard. I'll kill them, so play some battle music. He's a hard-rock kind of guy."

"Don't be stupid." Dazai had cold eyes.

"The captain has been killed! Our target is the gravity manipulator! Open fire!"

Gunfire raises all at once.

Chuuya kicked the ground and became a black afterimage.

And it became a battle. —If an attack from one side has no effect and unilateral violence that is kicked flying can be called a battle.

The 7.92mm bullet released from the rifle hit Chuuya, but didn't pierce through him and instead bounced back as if a piece of wood had hit it. The weight was lost at the same time as it hit him. Chuuya sprinted low, like a carnivorous animal, without losing momentum. And, he hit one of the enemies.

The enemy was blown up as if he was in the middle of an explosion. Landing sideways on the torso, Chuuya jumped back in the opposite direction. Moreover, the gun close to the enemy's hand was released and the barrel was broken. Chuuya, whose weight was lost, jumped again using the barrel as a foothold. He floated high in the sky. One of the bullets hit Chuuya's shoulder while in the air. However, Chuuya manipulated gravity and repelled the bullet in the opposite direction. The bullet penetrated the enemy's shoulder and he sunk into the ground.

The muzzle couldn't catch Chuuya, who sometimes flew around like a hurricane and sometimes crashed into the ground like a meteorite.

"Haahahahaa!" Chuuya shouted happily while in the air.

His overwhelming speed and reflexes dominated the life of the place. Dazai could only forget to breathe and watch over the battlefield dominance like a storm.

Eventually, there was one enemy left. While blood shed from his shoulders, he glared at Chuuya through bloody eyes. The enemy's rifle shot at him blindly with a reserve magazine until the trigger's clicking resonated with a light sound.

"Tell me the purpose of your attack." Chuuya slowly approached him in the forest. He took his time, like a king. "What do you know about Arahabaki? Why did you aim for the mafia's executive?"

"Damn... A brat like you...!"

The last enemy abandoned his rifle and pulled out his spare handgun.

"Give it up." Chuuya doesn't change his facial expression. "Your gun doesn't work. In any case, that injury is pretty severe. It's dangerous for you to shoot."

"Die...!"

The gun was fired.

Chuuya tried to manipulate the gravity of the bullet— but couldn't. There was no need to. Due to his injury, the bullet's aim was off and passed by the side of Chuuya's head.

The bullet hit a big tree behind them and was repelled by the hard bark. A bullet that flew at a speed of 1,000 km/h retained its speed even after rebounding. The bullet changed from a spiral rotation to an irregular rotation and returned to the owner as a dangerous bomb.

The crushed bullet pierced the man's neck.

"Ka-..."

The man fell on his back, unable to give a cry of surprise. A few seconds later, blood erupted.

An unfortunate accident— but quite common on the battlefield.

Chuuya, who witnessed the whole thing, frowned and made a small click of his tongue. "...Tch. I told you so."

Then he turned away from the man and started walking. "The enemy has been disposed of. Let's hurry up and go."

Dazai didn't reply. He approached the fallen man unsteadily and crouched next to his face.

"How unfortunate for you. Does it hurt?" Dazai's expression was flat. However, in the depths of his eyes, the brightness of a boy who longed for a firefighter has when he sees a firefighter flickered slightly.

"...Ka..."

"A bullet is stuck in your throat. Even if we treat it now, there's no saving you. Still, it'll take about five minutes to die. You shouldn't have used the gun." Dazai shook his head slightly. "That's five minutes of hellish suffering. I wouldn't be able to stand it. What do you want to do? Would you like this gun to end your suffering?"

The man was gasping in pain. He tried to speak, but his voice couldn't handle it.

"I work for the mafia. In other words, your enemy. But, I got to see the preciousness of your death, and I want to thank you. Now, if you want to say yes, you should do it before you can't talk."

The light of despair was set in the man's eyes.

"...Shoot..me.... Please..."

"Sure thing."

Dazai stood up and pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit his head, so the man's body became nothing more than a simple object.

"Hahahaha!"

Dazai shot the gun even more. Bullets hit one after the other. The man's corpse jumped.

"Hahaha! What a luxury! Hahahaha!"

"Stop it, idiot."

Chuuya grabbed the gun from the side and stopped it.

Dazai saw the handgun that he grabbed, saw the corpse under his feet, and then looked at Chuuya. He had a mystified face.

"He's already dead. Don't shoot dead bodies in vain."

Dazai looked at him blankly. He was more like a boy than anybody had ever seen, an expression appropriate for a child.

Then, Dazai sniffed and gave a dull smile. "You're right. You're absolutely right. That would be the normal way to think."

He threw the pistol away like it was dirty and walked as if he had lost interest in both Chuuya and the corpse.

His expression returned the usual one he wore. A gray look that wasn't interested in anything or anyone..

"Haha. Ordinary? Hahaha."

Dazai's dry laughter was sucked in between the trees and disappeared.

* * *

"Ugh, it's cold... The ventilation gets better and it's three times colder... I want to spend the rest of my life like moth larva, in the dirt and not exposed to the wind..."

On the second floor of the mansion, the executive, Randou, was shaking.

The inside of the house was desolate. The wall material was peeling off due to the explosion and the cracked lights fell off the ceiling. All the items on the shelf were scattered on the floor; blue plates, moss-colored books, and paintings were decorated across the floor. As a bonus, the dead body of an enemy soldier garnished the floor like a decoration, and the red blood gave it a sense of unity. It was like avant garde art.

"What a disaster, Randou-san. Here, this is the wood that goes into the fireplace."

"Ugh... You saved me, Dazai-kun. I'm really glad that there's a fireplace in this mansion... Without it, I would have had to jump into a bonfire to quickly get warm..."

Randou, wrapped in a blanket, threw the wood handed to him by Dazai into the fireplace. The fire in the fireplace burned in the incinerator with a rumbling noise.

"Hey, bandaged freak. Where did you get the wood?"

"The pillar of the house." Dazai said with a cool face.

Dazai and Chuuya met Randou in a rough looking reception room.

Randou was a relatively old mafioso. He served the organization since the previous boss, but he was appointed to an executive after entering Mori's era. In the old boss's era, he was treated rather unfortunately, and for that reason took part in Mori's regime where he was treated as an equal, unlike with the old boss.

"I can guess the reason why Randou-san was attacked." Dazai said while throwing the books on the floor into the fireplace. "'Rumor expansion'. If Randou-san, who's with Mori, was killed in an explosion, people would be even more confused about the 'previous boss's anger'. In fact, I checked the GSS command vehicle before coming here, and I found a procedure to disguise this black explosion."

"A black explosion...?" Randou repeated while trembling.

"I don't know much about it, I'll look into the technical part later, but if you use flame reaction from chemicals with a sodium lamp as a light source, it seems that you can make a flame with a color close to black." Dazai said while looking at the documents he picked up. "At any rate, it was a poor cover-up tactic. In the end, after failing to dispose of Randou-san, the cover-up operation unit got the tables turned on them and were killed."

"Basically, this is what happened." Chuuya shifted his weight to his right leg and put his hand on his waist. "The GSS guys impersonated 'Arahabaki' to create an internal discord within the mafia and attacked Randou, but failed."

"That's right."

"So the mastermind of these events was the GSS's captain?"

"I think there's a high probability."

"Ugh, so cold... The GSS's current boss is a cold hearted ability user. Moreover, he is rumored to have a close relationship with the North American secret organization, 'The Guild'... If you do plan to take care of it, you have to make a lot of preparations... Dazai-kun, the fuel in the fireplace, another one..."

"Yeah, here." Dazai said while handing over an expensive painting. "There's no need to go after them. Our purpose is to expose the lies of the previous boss's resurrection to the public. Randou-san, there's something I want to ask."

"Brr... Sure. I can't go against the instructions of those who have the Silver Oracle... Mori-san is a benefactor that put me in a high position..."

"That's good. Well then, tell me more about Arahabaki that you witnessed in Suribachi City. That's the only information that can lead us to the criminal for now."

"Ah... That... I remember it well."

Randou buried his chin in the blanket and said, "How could I forget?"

"Randou-san?"

Dazai looked at Randou.

Randou's hands were shaking.

Dazai knew immediately— the tremor in his hands was not because of the cold.

"I... survived. But, all of my subordinates... they burned. By that black flame... Dazai-kun. Your strategy is correct. Rather than take down the criminal, you stop after revealing their scheme. Keep doing that. It's what you should do. Because that thing's really god. A bundle of humans couldn't possibly realize..."

Randou's cold colored eyes were clearly terrified.

Dazai had never seen Randou's face so terrified. No one had ever seen the remarkable fear that doesn't even move an eyebrow when seeing hundreds of corpses rolling down the road.

"Tell me in more detail, Randou-san." Dazai gave a slight laugh. "I'm interested."

Randou coughed once, compared the two boys with gloomy eyes, then opened his mouth.

—That happened almost in the center of Suribachi City. Us mafia were fighting the armed boys of the Sheep. It was on that day we began to fight because two days before, a Sheep attacked a mafia member who got on board a passenger plane, and the reason they attacked an airplane was

because we raided a Sheep warehouse, and the cause of that was the Sheep last month... Well, no one remembers who was the first to cause trouble. Unlike dark societal films, there is almost no clear line between good and evil in our world. I don't think there's anything else to say.

Ugh... it's cold. Sorry, would it be possible to prevent the breeze from coming in by plugging the hole with the rubble? Yeah, right there. Thank you. That's it.

I was on the way to the dispute. Suddenly, all of us were blown away by a black blast.

If you were to compare it to the explosion by the GSS on my house, their explosion was like a baby's sneeze. All the important men died. Because I made a subspace developed by my ability, I survived.

The world that was there; by no means can it be expressed by words alone.

At least, it was not in this world. Black flames, boiling earth. The houses melted in an instant, the air burned out, and the utility poles became ash faster than it could fall.

If you dared to describe it—it was hell. It was the scenery of the abyss that appeared in the picture scroll, as imagined by a writer hundreds of years ago.

I was at the center of the abyss.

At the heart of the explosion was not the previous boss. It's shape looked nothing like him. It wasn't even human.

A beast.

It was a black beast.

A quadruped beast. It's fur was flame, along with it's thick tail. It's pair of eyes had flames as if they had sprouted from the purgatory.

It's size and silhouette resembled that of a human, with it's limbs close to the ground. But everything else was beyond being human. Above all, it's presence was different. It had a body that had concentrated and condensed all the calamities and slaughter since history began. Or it can be said that

the source of energy in this world where celestial bodies and galaxies have materialized was held by it.

No doubt there was no ill will and no anger. There was no emotional tremor. It was just there, simply being.

I looked around for something that could reasonably explain this phenomenon.

Maybe this was an enemy gifted. Thinking about it now, there was no way that one ability user could produce such a huge amount of heat, but at that time there was no other hypothesis. However, there were no ability users around. I couldn't see anything. To be precise, not even the landscape existed.

Everything on the ground was shaking with a high amount of heat. Even the color of the sky was unclear. Moreover, the scenery was like a watercolor painting with splashed water. It seemed as if everything in this world had turned into a ghost. But, for some reason, I remember that the Yokohama sea was quietly crawling on the surface of the gray steel, which was the same as the sea where I looked from far away.

The beast that left the sea and blew everything away saw me.

It felt as if molten lead had been poured over my internal organs.

The next moment, something incredible happened.

My ability—a trap in the subspace area.

Whether it's fire, swords, thunder, lightning, light, or sound pressure, the space itself will never jump over it. It's the same as a right hand novel's hero cannot defeat a left hand novel's villain. The dimensions are different after all.

But, the beast did it.

It went beyond the laws of physics.

So is the beast a god or a devil?

I immediately rebuilt the subspace. But the moment of renewal was enough for him. Something I couldn't see struck me.

It was a torrent of power itself. Pure energy before being converted into concrete forces such as heat, light, and lightning. Perhaps the black flame, this original energy's aftermath, uses smoke from an explosion to release that energy. I was struck by that energy. It's not a dimension that can be done in by a mere gifted.

My body was already blown into the air when the subspace was rebuilt. If my defense was delayed for another second, my whole body's cells would be crushed and my body would have disappeared without a trace from this world. Therefore, you could say holding my ground against that explosion was rather fortuitous.

Right before I lost consciousness, I heard a beast's roar.

It was a voice that didn't contain any emotion or will.

I was scared of it.

It was not a voice that scares you. Neither threatening nor a threat. The voice was just there. I understood immediately. It simply exists to cause as much destruction as it can.

It was scarier than any conflict.

I don't have any memories after dancing in the air and rolling on the ground. I was fortunate enough to be rescued and able to live like this. If he had the intention of killing me for a single hair, I would have died instantly.

If someone says that is god, I would believe it. There was no flood of murderous intent. There was no eruption of murderous intent. No typhoon, lightning strike, or tsunami of a murderous intent. But it killed many people in an instant. That beast is like that. Such an existence is called a "God" in this country. What else would you call it?

—Randou's words were broken off there.

Neither Dazai nor Chuuya opened their mouths immediately.

"Sorry... You guys probably wanted to prove that the previous boss's resurrection wasn't thanks to the power of Arahabaki, but was a disguise by an enemy ability user. However, if you report the story to Mori-dono... Rather, if Mori-dono feels like the reality of the god 'Arahabaki' has become realistic, your investigation will be useless."

"No, it was a very interesting story." Dazai said with a smile. "Thanks to your story, I understand everything."

Chuuya looked at Dazai. "What?"

Dazai laughed like he was in a play and half turned his body.

"I know the real culprit and his plot. The case is solved."

Phase.03

Dazai and Chuuya's fists clash.

"Tell me who the culprit is!"

"No way!"

Chuuya quickly approached Dazai, not waiting for the end of his reply. He unleashed a powerful lower kick.

Dazai kicked the ground and avoided it. Rotating in the air, he used his momentum of the drop to swing down his weapon.

Chuuya raised both of his hands to guard against the black metal rod, even though it was as tall as an adult male. Taking advantage of Dazai's momentary stiffness when he landed, Chuuya slammed a quick fist that was as fast as the rain against him.

"You don't know who it is, do you!"

"No, I know. Unlike a certain elementary school student."

Facing a series of barraging fists, Dazai had no choice but to fight. Dazai retreated, and was driven to the corner of the battlefield.

"Come on, come on! Defending won't win you the battle!"

Finally, Chuuya chose a rather bold, raised kick. It was a powerful technique that rotated him vertically on the spot and kicked his opponent into the air.

However, Dazai didn't miss the gap a few moments before he hit.

"Yes! Too bad!"

When Dazai quickly pressed a button, his character emitted a light. Destructive light beams spread from the brandished metal rod and hit Chuuya's character.

"No! Wait!"

Chuuya's cries were drowned out by intense electronic sounds. The swung-down metal rod didn't stop and drew countless flashes onto the screen. Attack, attack, attack, attack. Attacks continued to rain down like a storm, and Chuuya watched it with a dumbfounded look.

Eventually, Chuuya's character fell to the ground while the word 'victory' shined above Dazai's character.

"And that's the end. Were you unaware of your playing abilities?"

"Dammit! One more time!"

The two were in an arcade in the downtown area. There were lively electronic sounds and clatter of the customers all around. The two of them faced each other on opposite sides of the game station and engaged in a competition through a fighting game.

"We can fight one more time, but the results will be the same. Despite how it looks, my hand is dexterous." Dazai said while waving his hand. "Now... Remember our promise? 'If you lose, you must follow one order from the winner, like an obedient dog'. What should I have you do?"

"Damn... I was so sure I would win...!"

After retiring from Randou's house, their opinions were in opposition. Dazai objected to Chuuya, who insisted on finding the criminal's whereabouts immediately, that he should wait and carefully prepare to make the capture easier. During that argument, Dazai refused to say the name of the criminal he discovered. But solving their problems through violence and intimidation was prohibited by Mori.

As a result, video games were chosen as a fair solution to make the other surrender. Then, with the stakes being the defeated person would submit to the winner, the two of them went to the downtown area.

Furthermore, the two would be playing the same game with the same stakes at the same arcade hundreds of times from now on in the future— that would be reported on a separate occasion.

"Your self-confidence seems to have been bought on sale." Dazai said while lightly rocking his body. "Your defeat is due to your strong ability. It's too strong, so you never learned to be cunning or tactful. You are still a child, just like your height shows. So you can't win. Whether it's a video game or riddles, you can't win."

"Riddles?" Chuuya glared at Dazai. "I don't remember doing any riddles, let alone losing. You probably just let the 'culprit you discovered' get away with your selfishness! I can't believe it."

"That's right." Dazai nodded. "But you don't know who the culprit is, right?"

"Huh?"

"Do you know who the culprit is?"

"...iddle." Chuuya made a face and turned the other way. "...ember..."

"Hm? What?"

"....decided... to..."

"What? I can't hear you."

"I know who it is!" Chuuya stomped on the game and shouted angrily. "I'm not stupid all the time, you freak to society!"

"I got it, thanks. Then, let's have a contest to see who can catch the culprit first. If you win, we can call off the bet that we had. But if I win, you're my dog for life."

"Hmph. Do you think I'll falter if you make tough conditions?" Chuuya looked at Dazai through threatening eyes. "That's just an empty bluff, bastard. Bring it on, I'll accept this contest. You don't think I'm cunning or tactful? I can't go around showing my trump card to guys like you."

"Way to go, your statement is quite good when you stand up provocatively! I really admire you. There there, good boy."

"Don't pat my head!"

Chuuya kicked away Dazai's hand that tried to pat his head teasingly.

Meanwhile, Chuuya's hands were still in his jacket pockets.

"That reminds me," Dazai said suddenly while watching Chuuya's kick. "I've never seen you fight with your hands. Whether it was with Hirotsu-san or GSS, you attack your opponents just by kicking. Your hands are always in your jacket. What's the reason? Are you worried about your nails breaking?"

"No. It's just how I fight."

"Ahh, I see. You intentionally don't use your hands." Dazai smiled knowingly. "It seems that there is a contradiction inside you, Chuuya-kun... There's a division. At first, I didn't know what would happen in a fight between two fellow ability users. During yours and Hirotsu-san's battle, you had a natural advantage, so there can also be an unknown ability that's your natural enemy. And you won't know until you actually see that ability. So, in

this industry, it's common sense to always be prepared for encounters with those types of ability users. Of course, I'm an exception because of my disabling ability... What are you thinking in battle? Why are you cornering yourself with that technique?"

"You don't need to know that." Chuuya averted his eyes.

"Then, let's change the question. The powerful deity 'Arahabaki'. Why are you looking for it?"

"...That's..." Chuuya, who was about to say something, left his mouth open and stiffened at the appearance of someone.

"Hm? What's wrong, Chuuya-kun?"

Chuuya quickly turned his back to Dazai and hid his face with the hood of his jacket.

"Don't call out my name!" Chuuya whispered in a small voice. "Don't talk to me! Quietly look at the screen until they're gone!"

"They?"

Dazai looked around towards the arcade's entrance.

There were three youths who were looking all around their surroundings for something; two boys and a girl around the same age as Dazai and Chuuya.

They were a trio that didn't have any particular characteristics pop out about them in this downtown area. However, all of them had a blue band wrapped around their wrists.

"That blue band... A mark worn by all members of the Sheep." Dazai looked at the trio and turned back around to Chuuya. "Would it be a bad thing if you met them?"

"I don't think it'd be a good idea to meet them under these circumstances!"

"Ah... I see."

Dazai thought for a minute with his thumb on his chin, but eventually a thin smile spread across his face. Then he shouted.

"He~y, Chuuya-kun! We need to get back to work immediately~! Wasn't that the boss's orders~?"

"You...!"

Almost at the same time as Chuuya's venomous whisper, the trio reacted to Chuuya's name. Then their faces lit up.

"Chuuya! We finally found you! We've been looking for you!"

Chuuya waved his hands and called out to the trio, sighing deeply. After that, he made a composed face as the three headed towards him.

"You guys are safe? I'm glad." Chuuya said in an adult-like voice. There wasn't the slightest flicker of emotion on his face. His expression was like stone.

"What's going on here, Chuuya?" A silver-haired boy in the middle of the trio frowned. "Have you heard, Akira and Shougo were captured by the mafia!"

"Don't worry." Chuuya said in a voice devoid of emotion. "That matter is now being dealt with. The eight people who were captured will be able to come home unharmed."

"Being dealt with... Where? There were rumors inside the organization, you know. You surrendered to the mafia, then became their subcontractor and ran their errands like a dog! How hard it was for me to crush those rumors—well, that's fine. Let's go into their base and show them some pain! Like we always do!"

Dazai listened to the Sheep's conversation with a joyous expression in his eyes, watching them silently.

"Before that, what additional information have you guys gathered on the rumors about Arahabaki?"

"Huh? Ah..." The silver haired boy exchanged glances with his friends, as if he was confused. "Of course, the investigation is ongoing. As requested, we traced the numbers and origins of the rumors, and most of them showed up two weeks ago, like we expected. Rumors of seeing the black flame and the old mafia boss increased after that explosion two weeks ago. Before that, it seems like the rumors were only heard in circulation..."

Suddenly, Dazai interrupted. "Then, when was the oldest confirmed rumor that did some damage?"

Everyone looked to Dazai.

"Hey... Chuuya? Who is this guy? Does he want to join?"

"Well... Something like that." Chuuya glared at Dazai and turned his eyes back to the Sheep members. "Sorry, would you mind answering his question?"

"Sure, I guess..." Said the silver haired boy after looking between Dazai and Chuuya with a perplexed face. "The oldest, concrete rumor that did damage would probably be eight years ago. During the last years of the Great War where the huge explosion made Suribachi City. Arahabaki hadn't caused any damage before that."

"Just as I thought..." Dazai said with a satisfied face.

"Hey, Chuuya, is this guy really a new member of the Sheep? No matter how much you want to, you can't allow a new face to enter without consulting the rest of us. True, you are the strongest and you contribute the most to the organization. But for the time being, I'm one of the thirteen council members. You've been criticized by everyone for being tyrannical."

"I know." Chuuya interrupted him in a low voice.

"Is that so... In that case, it's fine. I said all I needed to say to you. Honestly, everyone relies on your power. That's for sure." The silver haired boy familiarly patted Chuuya's shoulders in a friendly way. "We need to make a rescue plan at once. Akira was kidnapped at the factory on the other side of the river. Actually, I was there at that time. I just barely managed to hide."

"Wait, you went to the factory?" Chuuya asked sharply. "Did you guys go to steal alcohol again? In the midst of conflict! And so close to the mafia's base... That's like asking to be abducted!"

"Don't shout." The boy frowned. "We didn't go to kill people. I was just abiding by our defense policy. Isn't this a good opportunity? The Sheep have only one counterattack rule, lay your hands on the Sheep and we hit back a hundred times harder, right?"

"Yeah... But—"

"Chuuya, aren't you always saying, 'People who have the means others don't ought to fill that responsibility'? Take responsibility as someone who has an ability, Chuuya!" The silver haired boy walked towards Chuuya and grabbed his shoulders. "Now, let's go!"

A sudden applause sounded.

"Interesting." Dazai said. He had a smile on his face and was slowly applauding. "You guys are very interesting. The battle enthusiast, Chuuya-kun, acts just like a sheep in the eyes of wolves. It seems that standing at the top of an organization is much harder than I imagined. I'll have to pat Mori-san on the back later."

"You suicidal bastard..."

"You, Sheep. You can't take Chuuya-kun with you. He's in the middle of work right now. At the command of the Port Mafia."

"What?" The silver haired boy looked at Dazai with a dumbfounded face. "It's not a rumor? But, that's impossible! There must be a reason why Chuuya would give in to the mafia..."

Though when he looked at Chuuya, he seemed to realize something from his heavy expression. "...Seriously?" Muttering, he took his hands off Chuuya. He took a step back in disbelief.

"Chuuya. Is this a joke? Or a strategy? If you break into the mafia and destroy it on the inside..."

"No, it's true." Chuuya shook his head with a hard voice. "The mafia's leader is serious. It's not easy to outwit him. He's got surveillance over me."

"Surveillance?"

Chuuya pointed to Dazai with his gaze. After a few seconds, the Sheep understood the situation and recoiled.

"This kid..?!" The three Sheep members took a few steps back. Even though they have collided with the mafia members before, this was the first time they've met a direct subordinate.

"That's right. Nice to meet you."

"H...Hey, Chuuya! What are you just standing here for? This guy is a monitor for the Port Mafia's boss! We should quickly take him hostage and hurt him... no, kill him!"

"Oh my, I'm scared." Dazai jokingly raised both of his hands. "I give up, I have no chance of winning four on one. I'll do anything, just spare my life. I know, I'll get Mori-san to release the hostages."

"...What?"

Ignoring the four's bewilderment, Dazai took his cell phone out of his breast pocket, punched in a number, and put it to his ear.

"Hey, Mori-san? How are you, with that hole of anxiety in your stomach? Oh, you feel it dissipating?" Dazai happily talked into the phone. "The investigation is going well. We'll be done soon. Regarding that, I have a favor—can you release the Sheep hostages? Yes, that's right. Immediately. Unharmed. It's ok, your teaching practices... Sure, bye."

Dazai pressed the end call button and put the phone away. "And now, the hostages will be released."

For a moment, the Sheep looked to each other with bewildered faces.

"Hey, kid, do you even have the authority to release the hostages? On the phone, it looked like you were using the boss by his chin—"

The silver haired boy had a dubious expression, and was surprised when his mobile device rang soon after. "Woah—It's true! I got a text saying everyone returned safely!"

The three Sheep were pleased. However, only Chuuya looked at Dazai suspiciously and not with pleasure.

"You... What are you playing at?"

"It's proof of my friendship." Dazai had a mysterious smile. "Now, let's go. We have work to finish."

"Work?" The silver haired boy laughed like a fool. "Chuuya doesn't do the mafia's work. You don't have any more hostages." The silver haired boy tugged on Chuuya's arm. "Let's go, Chuuya. Everyone is waiting for you!"

However, Chuuya didn't move.

"Hey..."

"Sorry. You guys go on ahead." Chuuya shook his head.

"Huh? ...What are you saying?"

"I'm going to catch this criminal." Chuuya's expression was hard.

"No... So, were you threatened by the mafia?" The boy had a smile affixed to his face. "There's more important work right now. We need to take revenge against those guys for kidnapping Akira and the others. We already know the kidnapper. They're an armed group called 'The Black Lizard'. They're a formidable enemy, but I don't care if you're there. Let's go already."

The silver haired boy grabbed Chuuya's shoulder and pulled him back. However, Chuuya still didn't move. He was completely still.

"Hey, Chuuya. This is ridiculous."

"Arahabaki comes first." Chuuya was solid, as if he had forgotten how to move. "I made a bet with this guy on who can catch the criminal first. I can't lose."

"What? You bet?" The silver haired boy shouted. "What's up with you? Everyone's waiting on you to beat up the enemy! Your counterattack's reputation is why the Sheep can hold territory in this city—'Mess with us and you won't be forgiven', it's because of your reputation! You're at your own convenience!"

"Lay off him already, Sheep." Dazai spoke beside them. "Chuuya-kun decides how to use his ability, he doesn't need your approval. I found something more important to your talisman, so I'll be taking your blessing."

The Sheep looked at Chuuya in disbelief.

"Hey, Chuuya... Are you serious? Without your ability's power, the Sheep's counterattack won't be viable. Our territory would be crushed in a week! Or do you..."

The silver haired boy took a step back.

"You... Don't tell me, are the rumors true? You betrayed the Sheep... and you carried out the work as a mafia member for a reward...?"

"The mafia has nothing to do with this. This is my problem."

"Really? How will you prove that?"

"It's impossible to give proof. You guys just have to believe in him." Dazai got in between them. "Is that not enough? He's your friend... Come on, let's go."

As Dazai drew a reluctant Chuuya away, the trio realized it was useless to demand anything else. Chuuya had a hard expression and didn't look back.

"Don't forget, Chuuya! Back then, you appeared out of nowhere with no relatives or identity, and the Sheep were the ones that accepted you!" The silver haired boy told Chuuya as he left. "So take responsibility, Chuuya! Accept your 'upper hand'. We never said it, you always said, 'Those with strong means have a responsibility'. Shouldn't you go over and think about it one more time?"

Chuuya didn't reply.

He silently left the Sheep without turning back.

Phase.xx

— was unresponsive in a bluish black darkness.

There was no top or bottom, no front or back. Even the flow of time was ambiguous. — didn't know who he was or why he was there.

It was quiet. All around him was filled with silence, like the bottom of a well or like the sea when a storm passes overhead.

— was surrounded in the sticky, bluish black darkness. It was a heavy darkness.

A transparent wall could be seen on the other side of the darkness. It surrounded him. — felt it was a seal. Though, he did not know such words. — did not know language. Because, — was not human. So, not as a clear word but a concept in its first steps, — sensed a transparent wall.

Beyond that, something occasionally flickered.

From right to left, then left to right.

It was a figure that traveled across the seal, but — still didn't know the concept of a 'human'.

There was a figure that peered into here, a figure that quickly passed, a figure that stopped in its tracks to complain about something. But, the figures were all separated by a seal. He felt like he was looking at the end of the world through a telescope.

One day—that seal was broken.

His sanctuary was disrupted, the darkness was contaminated, and the outside world invaded. Someone had summoned —. Violent emotions resembling a storm slammed against him, and — had gasped. He thought he would drown. He wasn't interested in things like the outside world. But the outside world wouldn't allow it.

A strong man's hand grabbed —.

A reddish black flame erupted from the touched part.

He gave his first cry.

To be born, he must throw away everything he had. — had completely forgotten. What was his former self? What did he feel in the darkness? That gentle, bluish black darkness. Gentle, and lonely. It no longer protected him.

His cries filled the outside world. They took on the form of a flame.

And the flame of anger demolished and incinerated everything on the surface as far as the eye could see.

And — was born.

Phase.04

"Please put that decoration near the ceiling on the right. Yeah, a little bit higher."

In a certain room, Dazai was preparing for a party.

It was in a reception room inside a shipyard building. The shipyard, which had gone bankrupt with the owner absent, was a suitable area for illegal organizations. The dock for repairing ships was now wide, vacant land, and the three story building that stood on both sides had calmly accepted its fate of destruction.

In one room inside that building was Dazai and Randou.

The room that once had high-class paintings and sinking, leather covered chairs, was now an abandoned house with water stains on the roof and colorful broken shards of glass. Dazai was in the middle of remodeling the room in the way he wanted so that no one had any complaints.

"Ahh, I can't wait. Imagine how happy Chuuya-kun is going to be when he finds out he's getting a grand party in honor of his new-found freedom."

Dazai hummed a song with good humor and fastened a decorative drape on the wall. His right hand was wrapped in a cast, but with his left hand he tied together multi colored decorations one after the other.

"Ohh, this drape is loooong. I've only just finished it. It looks like the room's walls are all full of decorations. Here, Randou-san, hold the end. With this extravagant decoration, Chuuya-kun will be moved to tears."

The room was decorated with fine crimson carpets, and the audio equipment played cheerful modern music that boys nowadays enjoyed. In the back of the room was a gold-plated tea wagon, and on top of it was a whole cake big enough to fill 20 people.

The lighting in the room was kept dark, and the brightly colored lights that flickered every few seconds made the room look like the deep sea at twilight.

"No, Dazai-kun... If this welcomed ordinary people, it would say, 'I'll kill you', I think..." Randou said timidly while helping put up the decorations.

"Why?" Dazai said curiously while holding a long, red drape. "No matter how you look at it, it's 'Chuuya-kun's congratulatory party on his liberation'. Cake, drinks, good music, friendly faces. What else is there?"

"I don't know about the young people... But I, at least, don't think it's a 'trap'..." Randou looked to the floor with a face like that of a small, troubled animal.

The pitfalls were perfectly hidden by the carpet. In front of the huge cake and seen from the entrance in the well-lit room. If you were prompted to go to the back, you would surely fall in the trap.

"Heh-heh... It's not just a pitfall! Chuuya-kun, after being blessed by every one of the Sheep, goes to the back and falls in here to the basement floor. Of course, at that kind of trap, Chuuya-kun won't even flinch. He would just kick the floor and come back up immediately. But unfortunately, there is no scaffold in the lower layers. Because at the bottom is a muddy sludge that will guarantee his drowning, after all. No matter how much Chuuya-kun kicks, it'll be difficult to escape. And... haha, the real guest of honor of this party is the 20 kilograms of wheat flour that falls on top of Chuuya-kun, who will be struggling in the mud. At the same time the pitfall opens, a little bit more of the powdered snow than what's considered romantic will cover his body with a thud. Chuuya-kun's gravity only works on objects he's touched directly, but since the flour is so fine, the remaining large amounts of flour can't be repelled away. Eventually, he will focus his gravity manipulation around his mouth to avoid suffocating and after finding some way to breathe, as his only resistance, he will shout curses up at me on the floor above. All while I eat elegant sweets and listen to his screams like banquet music. Ahh, just thinking about it makes me shudder!"

Dazai's cheeks were flushed with joy as he talked with a smile on his face, almost like a boy the day before Christmas.

Whereas Randou just finished the drape.

"Ah... Um, that... Well, at least I know you're cut out to be a mafia torturer..." Randou said with all his willpower, the edge of his lips twitching. "But, what is the plan to bring Chuuya-kun here?"

"Don't worry, I tricked some of his Sheep friends into coming here, disguising this as a real party. The preparations for that are almost complete."

"Ah, I see... As expected of Mori-dono's right hand man..."

"Mori-san often says, 'Let's deepen people's hate'." Dazai said, sticking out his chest.

"The meaning is different..."

After finishing the decoration, Dazai returned to Randou while dusting his hands.

"First, the Sheep and Chuuya-kun need to break up." Dazai said while walking. "They are like a fried dish cooking in gunpowder. I don't think they're aware of it. Neither Chuuya-kun nor the Sheep are aware that their current defense system is the worst structure ever. I wonder what they'll say? Pushing the other's buttons? An unstable group? Or the 'raw meat theory'?"

"The... raw meat theory? What's that?"

"Oh, I learned it from Mori-san... Think of three young people going to eat yakiniku." Dazai said while holding his chin with his fingers. "Put the raw meat on the brazier, and take it off when it's fully cooked. That's yakiniku. However, the three youths have a hearty appetite, so they're soon almost out. Everyone wants to eat more. In other words, it's a battlefield. Here, one person shows a sharp flash. He takes the meat a little before it's fully cooked. In that case, he can eat the meat before the other two. So he does just that. As calculated, he eats as much meat as he likes, and is very satisfied. Now, the remaining two get the short end of the stick and are not in an advantageous position. There's no point in having yakiniku if you have no meat. Is there a solution? Of course there is. You take the same strategy as your opponent... that is, you eat raw meat. There's no other choice. If everyone started eating raw meat, each individual would no longer be able to overthrow it. If you hold yourself back, you won't be able to get any meat. Thus, everyone falls into a sorrowful state where they can only eat raw meat—everyone knows that fully cooked meat is better after all. This is the 'raw meat theory'. It would explain half of the world's problems."

"Oh... In other words... As a result of the pursuit of individual happiness, the group happiness is ruined... And the person who started it can no longer stop it. So that's the situation." Randou turned his head. "Is that happening to the Sheep?"

"Heh-heh, the good thing about them is that they don't realize they're eating raw meat. They're very interesting toys, the Sheep and Chuuya-kun. You can see so many things in the underworld, it's such a fun place."

As he talked, Dazai gave a giggle.

"True... You could say that." Randou said, holding his hands over the lighting fixtures to keep warm. "Neither disputes nor violence are essential to living. If everyone said, 'Let's stop eating raw meat'... that is, declaring

and obeying a ban on weapons and fighting, violence would disappear from this world. But in reality, that's not the case. Someone will always break the rules. Being violent will always bring a huge amount of profit. If that happens, other people can only eat 'raw meat' and take ownership of their violent retaliation. That is the essence of conflict in this black society."

"The veteran Randou-san is far more familiar in this field than I am." Dazai said with a slight smile.

"Well... In the previous boss's reign, I was the lowest ranking member." Randou said as he rubbed his hands together for warmth. "It was a lower position with no basis or economic support. The work was to fight and die at the frontlines. I survived countless disputes thanks to my ability, but mostly through luck. Mori-dono replaced the boss, and my true strength was recognized when I got the position of executive... That's why I owe a debt of gratitude to Mori-dono. Annihilate the Mafia's enemies all for that person. I will give all my efforts in this crisis caused by Arahabaki."

"As I expected." Dazai smiled.

"And... Oh, right. Dazai-kun, you said you knew who was behind Arahabaki, but... Do you really know? Or was it a lie you used to tease Chuuya-kun?"

"Both." Dazai laughed. "What I said to Chuuya-kun before was to make him take the bet, but I do know who the culprit is."

"Oh... Who is it?"

"You, Randou-san."

Silence.

It wasn't just quiet, it was the kind of silence that drove all sounds away.

"You disguised yourself in the old boss's clothes and spread the rumor of Arahabaki... What do you say to that?"

Randou scratched his head as he thought of Dazai's question.

"Huh...? Oh—Um, I'm sorry, but this time... I don't know what sort of reaction I should have. I have no experience being called a criminal, you see."

"That's ok, everyone has their first time." Dazai grinned. "Then, let's first talk about your typical criminal's response... First, Randou-san, who was named the criminal, reacts like this, 'No way, that's impossible', or, 'Very funny, Dazai-kun'. Then I'd answer like this, 'But, there's no doubt you're the culprit'. Next, the criminal tries to refute with emotion. 'Did you not just hear my story? I feel great gratitude to Mori-dono. Are you scheming up an evil plan to start a civil war within the mafia and crush it?' Is this good enough, Randou-san?"

"No... Actually, that's true, I have nothing else to add." Randou sounded at a loss. "You're correct, my true intentions are just as you said. So... How do you react after that?"

"I'd say this. 'Your debt is irrelevant, Randou-san. Because your goal wasn't to attack the mafia in the first place. The culprit's goal was something different.' How's that? Can you take over soon?"

"Ah... Um... It's still a little confusing..." Randou scratched his head. "I'm not good at being the criminal. I have to react seriously... I know. What's your basis? All your accusations are only guesses—"

"—are only guesses, and have no logical basis that says I'm the mastermind'." Dazai took over the latter half of Randou's sentence. "That's right. I only have a good feeling, Randou-san. Now, without proof, I'm gonna have a hard time placing fault on an executive, right?"

"Well... I wonder if there is a basis. Because of your confidence..." Randou said with a troubled face. "What your basis is, I can't imagine..."

"If that's the case, I would like to ask you some things real quick. Sorry for acting all high and mighty." Dazai shrugged his shoulders and said, "You made a mistake. A very basic mistake. I'm sure you'll come to regret it."

"And this mistake was?"

"The sea." Dazai declared while waving his index finger. "You said, 'When I witnessed the black flame of Arahabaki, only the sea in the distance was quiet and calm like a gray, steel surface'."

"Yeah... I did say that. Because it's what I saw. Why was that a mistake...?"

"Did you really not notice?"

"No... I don't know what the problem is. Tell me."

"Alright." Dazai nodded then smiled. "Your location was in the middle of Suribachi City. And Suribachi City is a basin that was hollowed out into a depressed, spherical shape due to the explosion. Meaning..."

"Ah!" Randou suddenly exclaimed. "Ah... I see."

"Yup." Dazai nodded. "There's no way you can see the sea. If you are in the middle of a 2 km pit, no matter how hard you tried, you wouldn't be able to see it. —Now, it's easier if you realized that. Why did you say you could see the sea? Your other testimonies were perfect, and there weren't any inconsistencies with the rumors. The depiction of Arahabaki had a real persuasive power, I thought you were telling the truth. I think you did actually see the ocean, so *I* made a slight mistake. Though, it was from a long time ago when you could see the sea from Suribachi City... before the explosion eight years ago. In other words, Randou-san, you witnessed it? The disaster that created Suribachi City. The black explosion that gave birth to the rumors of Arahabaki himself."

Randou did not reply.

Dazai stared at Randou silently for a moment, then gave a little huff.

"The beloved rumors of the Sheep said the oldest rumor of Arahabaki was the explosion that created Suribachi City. That explosion was probably the starting point when the rumors of an ancient god, Arahabaki, began to be spread. There could have been other people watching from a distance. However, Randou-san, you witnessed it up close. Close enough where an ordinary person would have evaporated. As a result of trying to make that memory as accurate as possible, the impurity of the sea was mixed in. And from your inaccurate testimony, or rather your opinion, your motive showed itself."

Randou, who was listening quietly, sighed as if he had given up.

"You and Chuuya-kun had a bet." Randou said. "In that case, you won. Since you found the culprit first."

"Thank you, Randou-san." Dazai smiled. "With this, I can use him as my dog for life—"

Something broke through the wall and jumped in the room.

Randou's body was struck from the side and flew to the other side of the room.

"—ound you!" There was a violent shout. "I win the bet with this scheming bastard! You're the culprit!"

Randou broke through the wall of the building and flew outside the room, tumbling along on the ground.

On top of that, a small figure leaned forward.

Dazai couldn't believe his eyes. "...Wow."

"Sorry, but this is the end of the line for you." Naturally, Chuuya had a proud smile. "There's no escaping my eye. I predicted a long time ago you were lying about—Woah, the sly bastard! What are you doing here?!"

"That's my line, Chibi-san." Dazai said with a bored face. "Just so you know, I beat you to the prosecution. I was in the middle of explaining his crime."

"Huh? In the middle of? So you're not done yet? Then it's my win. I beat the culprit, in other words, my victory. The guy who is strong wins. That's the truth of this world."

"It's guys like you that make the world full of raw meat." Dazai said, a look of disgust on his face. "Did you come to that conclusion from Randou-san's inconsistency with the sea?"

"The sea?" Chuuya stared at him blankly. "What are you talking about?"

"Hm? Then how did you find out Randou-san was the culprit?"

"Right when I heard his story. So far, the testimonies had only talked about seeing the old man. However, he said he saw the body of Arahabaki. That's impossible, so I knew it was a lie."

Randou, who had been kicked by Chuuya and rolled on the ground, opened his mouth with a groan.

"Then you... thought I was the culprit because there's no such thing as a god?"

"Haha, you're wrong. It's the opposite. There actually is a god." Chuuya affirmed. "I know it. And there's no way you would have witnessed him in Suribachi City."

When he heard that line, Randou's presence changed.

His shivering from the cold stopped.

"Were you aware...that Arahabaki really existed?" Randou said as if he was being squeezed.

"Oh... You saw it, then? Eight years ago. If you didn't, you wouldn't have been able to give such an accurate testimony on what he looks like."

"Oh, I saw him..." Randou said, standing up. "But I didn't just see him. He gave me an explosion up close. It was a complete surprise attack... I was seriously injured and about to die, walking between the boundary of life and death. I lost my memories due to the shock and flames, wandering through the city of Yokohama. I caught the previous boss's eyes, stayed overnight in his organization, then joined the mafia..."

Randou looked at Chuuya with a heated gaze.

"Chuuya-kun, you must know—Where is Arahabaki right now?"

Chuuya didn't answer, just looked at Randou through a sharp gaze.

"Tell me."

"That's what I'm curious about, Randou-san." Dazai laughed slightly as he looked at Randou. "After all, you made this big deal about him just to know. Only the person who knows the truth of Arahabaki can see through his lie. The reason Arahabaki was portrayed accurately was because you used yourself as a huge bait to catch the person who knew the truth, right?"

Chuuya looked between the two for a while, and eventually shook his head.

"Geez... Why do you even want to meet that guy?" Chuuya said. "He has no mind or personality, he just exists. What will you do when you meet him? Pay your respects? He's a powerful deity, a simple lump of power. The same as a typhoon or earthquake. It's not much different from paying respects to fuel at a power plant."

"Personality is not a problem. A mind and thinking are not a problem."
Randou said in a solemn tone. "A great destruction. The burning earth, the dyed sky, the quivering atmosphere, a grotesque being. To reach that understanding, the state of nirvana. That power is enough for me. Tell me, Chuuya-kun. Existence beyond human knowledge—Where is the being that burned me?"

Chuuya didn't answer immediately. He turned his palm over, then turned it back around, gaining himself some troubled time. However, before long he sighed as if he had given up.

"Ok. I'll tell you what I know." Chuuya's eyes were clear. They were so clear that they could take in everything that they saw. "Arahaki—"

He took a breath, then exhaled.

And said.

"—is me."

* * *



Dazai took a step back.

"What... do you mean?"

Chuuya's expression was calm. His face suggested nothing, concealing his true goal. It was a face that only stated the facts.

"It's as I thought." Randou slowly nodded. "I thought he was there, vaguely."

"I only have memories starting from the middle of my life." Chuuya continued with a quiet voice. "It's not as if I temporarily lost my memories like you did. Only on that day eight years ago did my life come into existence. Before that, it was darkness. I floated in a blue-black darkness, sealed in an institution somewhere. Arahabaki is not a god. He has no power to resurrect the dead. I don't know why this personality of mine exists. All I know is someone's hand broke the seal and pulled me out. — That hand, was it you, Randou?"

A bluish black darkness.

A heavy and quiet darkness, surrounded by transparent walls.

And the strong hand of someone who broke the seal.

"Answer me." Chuuya said. "Where did you find me? Why did you take me out? And—how did you get his complete body to manifest? I followed this incident to find that out. I finally understand. Now, tell me everything you know."

There was no reply.

Randou had his face down, his hidden expression trembling. But it wasn't trembling from the cold—he was laughing.

"Of course, of course. Even if I were to refuse... You have the right to know." Randou said in a low voice. "But it's faster to show you rather than explain through words. This is what I did to you eight years ago."

The surrounding scenery began to change. The area around them wasn't the former shipyard anymore, but something completely different.

"Randou-san's subspace ability...?" Dazai looked around their surroundings. "But... a subspace transfer of this large of a scale shouldn't be possible, it's only been reported once..."

The subspace ability was expanding wide enough to cover the entire shipyard. The subspace, higher than the roof, began to flicker a deep, shining crimson.

"As you know... my subspace ability is a completely different world than a normal isolated space." Randou said. "You can't enter unless you've been invited in."

"Unbelievable." Dazai looked around. "So much power, just above the level of executives. An executive rank, no, even more... Such an extraordinary ability, how did you hide it until now? No one in the organization knows about this."

"I wasn't hiding it. I just remembered it recently. Along with... my true name." Randou took a step forward. Even in the crimson space, his bizarre presence was shown.

"True name? You're Randou-san."

"My name is not Randou." The space around Randou shook, and a black flame appeared. It blazed like petals around Randou without a sound. "The name Randou was given to me by a friend who saw the spelling on my belongings... And when I remembered my true name, I came to a decision. This plot. To defeat a fraudulent god using the devil. All of this, Chuuya-kun... Was to find and kill you."

Suddenly, the center of the subspace popped. The high density atmosphere descended down on them like a shock wave. However—it wasn't exactly an atmospheric wave. The explosion of the space itself, along with the creation of the wave, swallowed Chuuya up like a surging sea.

"Gah?!"

The spatial wave struck Chuuya violently, and blew his body away. He flew horizontally and broke through a rusty iron pole in the shipyard, then flew against the concrete wall.

"Ga....hah..."

Chuuya, who fell to the ground, could not even stand up as he spit up a large amount of blood.

"Hmm... Did you die already? Even though it's far from the complete Arahabaki, your body is said to be a resilient one."

"Hey..." Dazai looked at Chuuya, dumbfounded. "Why didn't you defend yourself with your gravity?"

"He couldn't. In this space, whenever I hit him with my shock wave, if it defies the physical laws of nature he can't defend himself." Randou said. "This subspace is my private kingdom. Therefore, my ability can only exist inside this interior. Like this."

There was the sound of wind blowing.

"Damn... This guy is crazy..." Chuuya put his hand on the ground and wiped the blood off of his lips. "He's come out."

A distorted, crimson haze emerged from the other side of the subspace, and a figure appeared.

"There... There is a nostalgic face. Hey, brat... Are you in good health? Have you been bullied by the doctor?"

It was the old boss floating in the air, wearing a traditional, black robe.

"Hey there." Dazai smiled stiffly. "It's been a while. How's your back pain? Your complexion is looking nice. Wasn't it a good thing you died? Boss—no, previous boss."

The old boss's limbs were skinny and, due to old age, his eye sockets were caving in. His blood vessels were visible on his cheeks and his eyes blazed, carrying only the brutality of the past.

The tyrant of the night, Yokohama's evil. His will for destruction was beyond human limits, and was even expressed as a curse. The personification of the Port Mafia's evil.

"The previous boss should have died. What have you done, Randou-san?"

"He is... my ability." Randou said, stretching his back. "My ability is to bring corpses into my subspaces, and make them ability users. I dug up the previous boss's grave. Although, only one corpse at a time can be brought to life and used as my ability. In short... The previous boss was brought to life to use as my ability."

Both Dazai and Chuuya were speechless. They both knew many ability users, but neither of them knew an ability as bizarre as this.

The ability to humanize.

"This goes above common sense." Dazai forced himself to say. "Randou-san, who are you?"

"I used to be a European Intelligence agent who was selected to bring back information on enemy nations." Randou said with his head down. "And eight years ago, I infiltrated this country for a mission. The purpose of the mission was to research a high energy life form located in this country, and take it back with me."

"And that is... Arahabaki?" Dazai said with a grim expression. "Even so... A European Intelligence agent? A 'transcendent' class of only a few dozen gifted with the highest rank in the world? Randou-san, you can't be serious."

"Let me introduce myself again." Randou bowed and put a nonexistent hat in front of his chest. "My name is Rimbaud. Arthur Rimbaud. My ability's name is Illumination. My objective is to capture you as a gifted, Chuuya-kun, and kill you."

There was a rush of explosions.

Chuuya jumped into the air to avoid the spatial wave of solid, red wall. He landed sideways on the building wall. He continued to avoid the spatial waves pursuing him, running alongside the wall.

"Tch."

One after another, the wall where Chuuya had been standing was pulverized into paperware. It was a powerful attack that could break even an iron pole. Once again Chuuya received a direct hit, and tried to stand back up.

"No matter how much you try and escape, you can't run from the space itself."

Shockwaves hit and flew off the walls. Even in the case of Chuuya, who can control his own gravity, his mobility in the air is drastically lower than when he is on the ground. He couldn't escape.

Chuuya laughed in mid-air.

"Haha! Is cornering me the best you can do?"

Chuuya turned around—kicking the empty air while avoiding the shockwaves.

"What—"

What Chuuya's shoe sole kicked was only a tiny fragment from the building. He kicked a fragment of the wall in midair that was only the size of his pinky, while at the same time maximizing the fragments gravity and minimizing his own. He reversed his mass ratio and quickly turned in the air without a foothold, like a flying squirrel who kicked and jumped off a giant boulder.

Spatial waves continued to attack Chuuya in the air. However, Chuuya continuously kicked debris in the air, avoiding the shockwaves one after the other.

"What a wonderful fighting ability... But if you only run away, you'll eventually be cornered, boy."

Chuuya avoided the next attack of spatial waves by heading down. As long as he was in the subspace created by Randou, there was no way to avoid his spatial attacks. Mass could not be held by the space waves themselves, so it could not be countered by gravity. It was surely an ability that was Chuuya's natural enemy.

But.

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

A shock wave rushed to Chuuya—but just before it hit, it vanished like mist.

Chuuya had raised the shield for protection.

"Hey, could you not pull on my clothes? It's making my neck hurt!"

Said the shield.

"Dazai-kun... huh?"

"He nullifies abilities." Chuuya said as he held Dazai. "Even though you can expand the subspace to not touch him, attacks won't be able to get through. And you're a European Intelligence Agent! You can't break through this guy's nullification."

"Hm... That's right. To me, Dazai's existence is a nuisance... The ultimate ability user whose existence is the only one of his kind. However—"

Randou raised his hand.

"Chuuya-kun! Push me back as much as you can!"

At about the same time that Dazai turned to shout at Chuuya, a flash of silver came running towards them.

The space was severed.

The flash of silver cut through where Dazai's neck had been just a moment ago. The tip of the scythe scratched a section of Dazai's clothes, skin, and muscles, blood spraying through them.

"Agh..." Dazai groaned.

Chuuya, who had pushed Dazai down and avoided the attack, stared at him in surprise.

"Impossible!" Chuuya shouted. "It shouldn't have hurt him."

The true form of the silver flash that cut Dazai was a long scythe as tall as a human being. The old man holding the handle of the scythe gave a muffled laugh.

"Cruel... Truly heartless. The day has come where the kid will be beheaded by this hand." The old boss said with a hoarse voice. "But before that, I'd like to talk about my memories... You're an enemy to me even in this body."

"Boss. You're no longer a human..." Randou told him gravely. "I used a formula to recreate your memories and personality from when you were alive to insert into my ability... You are simply my ability. And your mission is... to take Chuuya-kun's corpse while stopping Dazai-kun. With that scythe."

"Ok, I understand. This soul is a piece of torn paper clinging to your ability. This body is an automatic doll with no interior or self consciousness... But, it's an incredible feeling."

The old boss raised the scythe. A black cloth emerged from thin air and wrapped around him... like an old, western grim reaper.

"I give up." Dazai said in pain, holding the wound right beside his chest. "That scythe is real. It's something he gave to him. Meaning—"

"You'll die if you're stabbed." Chuuya glanced at Dazai.

Dazai's wounds were deep. All across the center of his chest and his upper arm was cut up. The clothes around his wound have already been stained red with blood. If not treated quickly, it was a life threatening wound.

"Tch... Seriously." Chuuya frowned. "I'm cornered over here, and he's in danger."

Spatial waves attacked Chuuya that he couldn't defend against because of the lack of mass.

The blade of the scythe couldn't be negated by Dazai because it was not an ability.

Dazai and Chuuya were completely suppressed because of one type of ability.

"Dazai-kun. I had no intention to kill you. It really hurts my heart to kill a boy." Randou said in a gloomy voice. "But if Mori finds out what you know, he will send assassins after me. I'll have to kill them. I want to avoid... former friends. Taking your life is only an expense, there won't be a payment. I'm sorry, but please die with Chuuya-kun."

Randou said he felt sorry. In his eyes was a darkness that was common in the mafia—a cloudy darkness that only considers human life in numbers.

The ability user once called Randou took a step forward. His body was covered in a black flame.

The old boss rose high in the air, his silver scythe shining with death.

"Ah... This is impossible." Dazai said in a flat voice. "Let's give up and die."

"Huh?"

Dazai suddenly sat on the ground. Chuuya watched him in surprise. Dazai had a very ordinary expression on his face. His face said he had nothing to hide; he had said what he was truly thinking.

"What the hell? Are you sleep-talking?"

"No, this is impossible. He's an ability-using European Intelligence agent, right? There's no way we can win."

"You..."

Before he was finished speaking, a sideways shockwave hit Chuuya.

He wasn't in time to avoid it by jumping, his martial arts stance leaving him exposed to the shockwave. Chuuya flew horizontally as if hit by a huge iron ball, then tumbled on the ground. He crashed into the rubble of the smashed wall.

"It's just as Dazai-kun said." Randou said, his hand still raised from generating the spatial wave. "Chuuya-kun, you should give up. I am fully aware of your ability traits. If you face me, you'll only suffer."

"Dammit..."

Chuuya grimaced, buried under the rubble of the wall. Drops of blood fell from the edge of his lips.

"My mission will not be achieved unless you are a corpse." Randou said in what seemed like an apologetic voice. "Eight years ago... I tried to escape by taking you away, and I made a mistake. I became surrounded by

enemies. The corpse I was using at that time wasn't able to break through the siege. So I thought—If I took you, the god among gods, 'Arahabaki', I would have the stronger ability. I beat and captured you, but... something unexpected happened. A safety device was brought in. In other words, you, Chuuya-kun. You, a human personality, were like a talisman, engraved on Arahabaki to prevent him from running wild. When I tried to take him in, the safety device came off, and the complete form of Arahabaki began to manifest. —The rest is as I said in my estate. The complete god had manifested, and blew everything away."

Randou took a step. The outside of his body flickered red, as if it had been scorched.

"I will not make the same mistake. This time, I will cut your head off and take out the true body of Arahabaki once you're annihilated. I've destroyed gifted who are far stronger than you. Resistance is pointless."

Randou spoke quietly. It was neither a threat nor a bluff, only a face that simply told the facts as they were. The space itself began to vibrate and concentrate on Randou. The earth, let alone the building, was waiting on a power enough for annihilation to be released.

"Hm... Randou-san. I have a proposal." Dazai said while holding his wound. "I'm gonna persuade Chuuya-kun to give up, so give me some time."

Randou turned his gaze to Dazai and thought silently for a while.

"How much time?"

"I want five minutes."

Randou closed his eyes.

"I don't mind two minutes."

Dazai staggered over to the rubble where Chuuya was. He leaned down and brought his face closer to Chuuya's.

"A bastard who wants to die draws near. I can't be persuaded."

"I know." Dazai glanced towards Randou, and whispered quietly so he couldn't hear. "Let's beat him together."

For a moment, Chuuya stared blankly at Dazai, as if he didn't understand what his partner was saying. "...are you serious?"

"There is a way. But it can't be done alone. You and I need to work together... Do you trust me?"

Chuuya stared directly at Dazai for a while. Then opened his mouth.

"Tell me why you changed your mind. Didn't you want to die?"

"Will 'I don't know why' not work?" Dazai smiled as if he was in trouble.

"No."

Dazai continued to smile and nodded. "Then I'll tell you."

Dazai looked at Randou, at the entire scene of the subspace, and at a distant city that couldn't be seen, and said.

"Just a little bit— I'm interested in the mafia's work." Dazai said. "In the surface world, the world of light, death is generally kept hidden from everyday life because it's unpleasant. But in the mafia's world, it's different. Death is just an extension and a part of everyday life. And I think that's probably right. Because 'dying' isn't the opposite of 'living', it's nothing more than a feature incorporated into 'living'. Breathe, eat, fall in love, die. You have to observe death up close to understand the whole picture of living."

Chuuya intently looked at Dazai's expression, as if he was searching for something human deep inside him. "In other words, you... want to live?"

"I didn't say that." Dazai smiled as if he had given up. "I might not find anything, but I thought I'd give it a try. Finish this job safely, join the mafia. Defeat him. Also—"

"Also?"

"I haven't fulfilled my promise to use you as my dog."

Dazai smiled.

Chuuya looked at his face, then broke out into laughter. "You really are the worst. Don't let your plan fail and kill us both or I'll kill you, Dazai."

Dazai laughed as well. "Sounds good. Let's go, Chuuya."

* * *

The two of them stood up and walked towards Randou, side-by-side.

"Finished your persuasion?"

"Oh." Dazai said while walking. "The persuasion went well. Chuuya persuaded me... I've decided not to die now."

Randou stared at them in bewilderment for a moment. Then he laughed as if he couldn't help it.

"Is that so?" Randou said. "When Mori-dono hears that, he'll jump with joy. Originally this situation would have been a blessing, but... I'll try to make your death as painless as possible."

"Tell me something." Chuuya laughed at the edge of his lips. "Do you know how I feel right now?"

"Well... I can't imagine."

"I'm happy. I haven't used both hands to fight in a long time!"

Chuuya jumped forward.

In front of Chuuya, a crimson wave burst. As if he was expecting it, Chuuya hit the ground with both his hands and jumped into the sky with a kick.

"You can't stop me unless you hit with both hands!"

Chuuya used both of his hands to scatter the gravel he had picked up during his leap.

Using the particles as a scaffold, he ran in the air like a bolt of lightning. Up and down, right and left. The crimson waves chased after his small body, but at the speed he was running, they could only break an afterimage.

"Hahahaha!"

Chuuya kicked the air with a laugh and jumped downwards. A full-might kick like a meteor hit Randou's chest.

"Hah...!"

Randou's breath was squeezed out of his lungs. He raised his arms and released his condensed subspace like a shield to defend against Chuuya's kicks. Severe shock caused the soles of Randou's shoes to crush the ground and create radial cracks.

"Now, Dazai!"

"Wha—..."

Dazai appeared before Randou's eyes. Hiding behind Chuuya's attack, he approached like a shadow.

"It's impossible for you to manifest your corpse if I touch you directly—!"

No ability can touch Dazai. And even if it touches a part of his body, the activated ability itself would be cancelled. In other words, it's similar to losing everything you own.

"...But."

A black darkness appeared between Dazai and Randou.

A corpse materialized, wearing an ominous black robe.

"It's time for you children to die, brat." The old boss announced in a hoarse voice.

"...You guessed, huh."



A silver scythe glimmered in the glory of death.

However, Dazai didn't avert his eyes. He stared at the falling blade with a quiet expression, as if he knew it wouldn't cut him.

In fact—the blade stopped. Right on the tip of Dazai's nose.

"I'm pissed, you sly bastard." Chuuya said in the air. "This is gonna go exactly as you predicted!"

"Hm?"

The old boss's scythe was caught in something black.

It was Chuuya's rider jacket. His jacket was thrown from the sky by gravity control and hit the base of the scythe.

Keeping its heavy weight, the jacket knocked the scythe down. The scythe rolled on the ground with a clear sound, while the jacket returned to its original weight and softened.

"Haaaaa!"

Chuuya's fists swung down towards the old boss. Each punch was equivalent to a shining, hot stone. The series of rushing attacks captured, beat, and smashed the old boss.

"Ugh..."

The old boss's body, which wasn't human, was being destroyed.

"Make friends with the ground, old man!"

Chuuya grabbed the old boss's face. Black gravity waves erupted from his face when he touched him. At the same time, the boss's body was taken from mid-air and forced into the ground.

Radial cracks sprouted all over the ground, originating from the center of where the previous boss was.

Even though the previous boss had collapsed to the ground, Chuuya did not ease his gravity. Because Chuuya was releasing the greatest output of gravity, his body sunk into the ground.

"Even though this body isn't human... I've been floored?" The ground had cracked, his whole body halfway down into the ground, but he gave a thin laugh. "How annoying. But this is admirable, boy."

"I've played my card." Chuuya shouted. "Now, Dazai!"

"Don't tell me what to do!"

On the ground, Dazai ran. His brandished fists greeted Randou.

There was no murkiness in his gaze. It was as clear as a cloudless day.

Those eyes weren't something that just anyone could have. They were the glow of a blue sky that only those who have decided to live can have.

"Ahhhh!"

Dazai's fists slammed into Randou.

—But before that.

The world fell.

"Wha—"

A crimson glitter covered the world.

The building disappeared, the ground disappeared, gravity disappeared. Every conceivable thing in the world was stirring, turned into fragments, and floating around aimlessly.

"You must know... I'm a gifted who can control space." A voice said in the air.

In the world of crimson, a human-like figure appeared.

"Being able to manipulate space means being able to manipulate everything inside that space... Dazai-kun, no matter how much you are my natural enemy, the very ground you stand on, your fist and the like cannot reach me by movement alone."

Randou floated in the subspace.

His clothes fluttered while an innumerable amount of debris floated around them.

"Hey... Are you serious?" Chuuya said while looking up at him. "It isn't fair, this scale of ability...."

Dazai looked around them in amazement. "If he can manipulate his space this freely, then entering the mafia's vault room would be a piece of cake..."

The inside of the subspace was no longer like any landscape on Earth. The ground was hollowed out, the buildings were crushed, and everything floated in the crimson atmosphere. Dazai and Chuuya were like little ants standing on a piece of rubble.

"Chuuya-kun, do you remember? You've been in this space before." Randou said while his cloth floated in the air. "Eight years ago on that day... I was infiltrating this place together with my gifted partner on a capture mission. My partner and I believed we had captured this energetic life form, the target of our mission, in a secret military facility... But, something happened at the facility when he woke you and you tried to escape. Something wasn't right. To this day I don't remember what had happened... All I know is, because of that, I was discovered, hunted down by the enemy, and forced to try and take in Arahabaki as my ability."

Debris fluttered around Randou. A faint sound filled the air, and something invisible roared in the space.

"Randou-san." Dazai said. "Arahabaki and Chuuya's body... What are they?"

"I myself don't know. It was one of my duties to bring Chuuya-kun home and figure it out... To be in charge of Chuuya. The isolated facility was destroyed by the explosion along with his record... No one knows the truth now. But if we take Chuuya-kun in, we can reconstruct his memory. Only then can we know everything. At that time, do you know what became of my friend?"

"Your friend...?" Looking up at the crimson world, Chuuya muttered.

"Yes. The fellow spy who infiltrated with me was also my best friend. His name was Paul Verlaine, a friend who was gifted and overcame many crises. Where did he disappear to? Did he die in the explosion, or does he live on somewhere? I can't remember that alone. That's why I need your memory,

Chuuya-kun. But if I take you in alive, it'll be a repeat of eight years ago. Therefore, you have to die this time. Then, I'll make your corpse my ability and grasp onto the memory of my friend's existence. To fill the eight years that were lost. To save him."

"I see... All for the sake of your friend?" Dazai said weakly. "The betrayal of the mafia, the resurrection of the previous boss, this battle... It's all a bit hard to believe."

"What don't you understand, you bastard?" Chuuya said, looking up at Randou. "I'd throw away everything for my friends. It's a very respectable thing to bet my life on... I don't leave any mercy for my opponents."

Chuuya concentrated his ability on both of his hands. The mass of his fists increased as the surrounding atmosphere began to quake.

"Hey, master. Want me to tell you why I don't use my hands while fighting?" Chuuya said while walking over to the enemy. Under his feet, countless pebbles trembled then rose. "I didn't lose in a fight. I didn't even think it was dangerous... Naturally, it's because I'm not human. My personality is what you called a safety device. It's a huge lump of power, like a blast furnace, and it feels like it's stuck at the edge. So... Do you know what that feels like?"

Chuuya stepped forward in the air on nothing.

The faint dust in the air was caught, and Chuuya's feet stepped into the empty air. He stepped into the next empty space of air. In that way, Chuuya walked towards Randou as if on an invisible staircase.

"So I've sealed my hands. If I did that, someday I might lose. When that time comes, I'd have to frantically defend myself instead of just enjoying the fight... And then I thought, I could form an attachment. I'm not in a state, I'm not the host of this body, I'm a human."

Chuuya kicked the air and jumped.

Chuuya flew like a bird of prey tearing through the crimson night.

Right in front of him, a surging sea of spatial waves were blocking his way. Chuuya rushed towards the spatial waves that could easily break the buildings like candy.

"What—?"

"Haaaaa!!"

Chuuya broke through the waves with an echoing sound of clothes and flesh. There were lacerations all over his body and he was bleeding from countless cuts, but he did not slow down.

"Did you increase the density of your clothes and body as you received the shock...?"

Blood trailed behind him like a tail, and all over his body his bones shrieked, but Chuuya had a bloody smile across his lips.

Chuuya sped up towards Randou with his horizontal gravity and turned into a live cannonball. There was no wall that could stop the murderous Chuuya. The wall of spatial waves was not enough. The old boss's substitute was not enough.

Chuuya's fist pierced deep into Randou's abdomen.

Randou's body bent into a U-shape.

Chuuya sped up even further until he was part of a living storm. A right punch tore through the atmosphere. Using the recoil, he gave a left roundhouse kick. He then used an axe kick like thunder with his right leg swinging around. With his heel held by gravity, he hit Randou with a right knee kick to his jaw.

Punch, kick, punch, punch, punch, kick, punch. Continuous attacks swooped in infinitely from every direction, almost like a heavy machine gun. Moreover, all the punches and kicks were meticulously hitting Randou's vital spots. A storm of fists and kicks that rained down indefinitely. That blow was a preparation for the next blow, and that attack accelerated the next attack. Nobody could stop it.

The next kick pierced his chest—Chuuya made a vertical rotation using the impact. He unleashed a whole body kick while drawing his afterimage in the sky like a wheel. The shock spread through the space and shook the whole area.

Randou crashed into the ground after passively taking it. A cloud of dust rose.

"...Amazing..." Dazai muttered, staring at the ground where Randou was, dumbfounded.

Chuuya landed in the cloud of smoke. Immediately after, he fell to his knees. He had fired a continuous series of lightning strikes at full power, and was quite out of breath. His hands supported his weight on the ground.

The dust clouds cleared up.

Chuuya, after raising his head, had frozen.

"Wonderful." Randou stood behind the cloud of dust. After eating such an attack, his body looked unhurt and his expression bore no pain. "Chuuya-kun, you have already acquired a different kind of strength and skill to Arahabaki. You are not a god, but a human being."

"Well... thanks..." Chuuya said while breathing heavily. "But after you took all that, you're still unhurt... As you can expect, I'm feeling a little down."

"Nothing I say will help. In here is my space." Randou put up his hands so his skin could be seen. "There is a thin film of severance in my subspace that acts as a cover for my skin. Any physical impact cannot go through this film."

"Ha... Everyone's an ant to a European ability user..."

A black shadow cast over Chuuya as he took another rough breath. Above him was a black robe. The old boss's corpse appeared.

A silver light swung down towards his head.

"Tch."

Chuuya couldn't stand up quick enough. He had used too much power. He raised his arm in defense, preparing his gravity for the moment the blade came down at him—but, the subspace tore through the gravitational field itself, making a rift.

In the breach, the tip of the scythe pierced precisely.

"Gah...!"

Chuuya's left hand, right underneath his wrist, was cut through. On the opposite side, the sharp blade was stuck in the ground. Chuuya was sewn down to the ground with the scythe, similar to a lab animal before dissection.

"That wound should stop your quick movements." Randou said, looking down at Chuuya. "Therefore, it'll be impossible to avoid the next shock wave."

From the sky, a shock wave violently hit Chuuya like a huge rock.

"Chuuya!"

Dazai was too far away to help him. It would take 10 seconds to run over the floating debris to the next scaffold.

"Another."

More shock waves. Cracks ran along the surrounding ground and lumps of earth flew in the air.

"Another."

More shock waves. This time, the shock wave hit from under the ground. The earth exploded and shattered in the air.

"The next one is going to be continuous."

Knocked down. Thrust up. Countless shock waves continuously attacked Chuuya from multiple directions. He couldn't even avoid them, much less take up a defensive position. It was like being hit by a high speed car from all directions. The attacks were seamless and never ending.

The crimson shockwaves finally came to a stop. His whole body was smashed to pieces, and he fell down face first. He was completely still.

A rusted tin can that was rolling next to Chuuya collapsed into a thin plate in the aftermath of the attack.

"Even a tank would become flat if it took this kind of beating." Randou said quietly. "Your broken bones and internal organs will be regenerated later as my ability."

Randou reached his hand out solemnly towards Chuuya. The light of an ability was on his fingertips.

He was trying to take Chuuya as his ability.

"Don't worry. Your soul and personality will be superficial information because of my ability, but... right now, it'd probably stay the same."

Chuuya's entire body was wrapped in the light of Randou's ability.

But.

"Thanks."

Chuuya quickly stood up—and pierced the scythe deep into Randou's chest.

"Wh...at...?"

Chuuya was alive. He had numerous bruises and cuts, and several bones were broken. But, he was not dead.

Chuuya pushed the scythe in his arm further. The blade went through Randou's chest, and blood squirted out.

"Im...possible..."

"I'm pissed, too." Chuuya said, distorting his face full of wounds. "All the way to the end, it went according to that crafty bastard's plan."

Dazai stood in a spot across the room.

"Sorry, Randou-san."

In his left hand, Dazai was holding a cloth.

It was a long drape from when Dazai was decorating the room to deceive Chuuya.



The drape was stretched across the ground, cleverly hidden beneath the rubble that had risen to the surface. And the tip had disappeared into Chuuya's clothes.

"When Randou-san collapsed the surrounding building, I instructed Chuuya to pick up this drape." Dazai had the smile of a young boy plastered on his face.

"I had that cloth tied to me because of my ability." Said Chuuya, who was still stabbed with the scythe. "I wrapped it around my body and hid it under my clothes."

"And at the other end, I touched it." Dazai held up his own cloth. "What happens then?"

"You touch the cloth... and my ability is nullified." Randou said, sounding like he was in pain. "In other words... it functioned as 'armor' that severed the subspace's shock waves...?"

"Exactly."

Chuuya pulled out the scythe.

An overwhelming amount of blood flew from the wound. The debris and rubble that had been floating lost its power and fell to the ground with a clatter.

"What... terrible children..."

Blood invaded Randou's respiratory tracts and overflowed from his mouth. He fell face first towards his own pool of blood with a wet noise.

Obviously—it was fatal.

* * *

The old days.

At one point, there were two spy agents.

The two were coworkers, partners, and best friends—more reliable than any brother.

At least, that's what they thought.

The two never faltered no matter how dangerous the place. It wasn't for patriotism. It wasn't for honor. They just knew that if they were with each other, they didn't have anything to fear. They believed that fear and hesitation weren't necessary for protecting their partner.

At least, that's what they thought.

One day, their mission came down from above. To infiltrate an enemy country and steal powerful weapons.

It was a dangerous mission. No backup, no logistical support, and no internal collaborators. Nevertheless, the two took on the mission. And at the enemy facility they infiltrated—they found "that". It was too bizarre.

This could not be left in enemy hands. It had to be taken back to their homeland and left in the hands of the researchers. Leaving such a thing would spark even more conflict. They had to take it home.

At least, that's what they thought.

* * *

The subspace began to disappear and the original blue sky spread out.

In the abandoned shipyard, where the ceiling was smashed to pieces, Randou lay collapsed with no strength left.

"I see... Paul, I see... You..."

"Do you have anything left to say, Randou-san?" Dazai said in a quiet tone.
"If you have any regrets, we can—"

"No... There's none..." Randou said with weak eyes. Their shine was about to fade. "Just now... When I received Chuuya's ability... I remembered my best friend... the end of Paul."

Unable to support his weight with both hands, he sunk into the pool of blood he created.

"He betrayed me... at the last minute..." As he blinked, the light seemed to fade from his eyes. "During the escape, he... betrayed me and his homeland. And from behind, tried to kill me... Paul and I, who ran away, fought me, and I... to my best friend, with these hands..."

"I see." Dazai said in a whisper that fell right to his feet. "If two gifted spies fight each other, their surroundings wouldn't be safe. It would create an uproar. Is it because the military already sensed it and surrounded you with troops? That's why, as a last resort, you tried to take Arahabaki..."

Randou rolled on his back, sinking in the blood, and looked at Chuuya with clear eyes.

"Chuuya-kun... Can I say... one thing...?"

"What?"

"Live." Randou whispered. "There's no way to know... who you are or where you came from." He said in a voice close to a wheeze. "But even though... you are just a figure on the surface... you are you. Nothing is constant... all humans, all life... the brain and the body, they are all just figures of the material world that contains them... just beautiful figures..."

Both Dazai and Chuuya silently listened to the words. They were both understanding something heavy from the words, something that should never be let go.

"It's strange... I'm not cold..." Randou had a small smile. "The world should have been so cold... You too, Paul... this warm feeling... at the end....."

Randou's hand fell in the blood.

The blood drops splattered and made a noise, then soon became quiet again.

The crimson subspace was quietly leaving and the blue sky was spreading overhead.

But there were things that did not return. The body of a man who no longer felt the cold. And the hearts of the two boys, who stood staring at the body.

A gust of wind blew, watching their souls as it passed.

Phase.05

And so, one month passed.

Day and night, tragedy and laughter, repeated over and over in the city. The series of destructive events, named "The Arahabaki Incidents", were handled with Randou as the sole offender. The traitor Randou's house was burned and his belongings dumped in the sea. Normally, close relatives to the traitors were thoroughly investigated as per the mafia's procedures, but there was no such thing as a close relative for Randou.

The body was left weather-beaten for a week before being buried in a shared rural cemetery.

A strong, salty breeze blew from the sea onto the cemetery.

It was a desolate, secluded cemetery, far from human habitation. A group of unnamed graves jutted out in lines along a cliff. Just off the cliff was the sea with all the graves exposed to the salty wind, leaning melancholically.

A boy was sitting alone on one of the graves, sitting with an uncomfortable posture.

"Honestly, you're an annoying old man even when you're dead." Chuuya said to himself with a sullen face. "All the documents you'd gathered while you were alive were thrown out by the mafia. Thanks to that, it's gonna be a pain to investigate. Eight years ago, what was the military facility you infiltrated, why was Arahabaki there... I was supposed to get a clue."

In front of Chuuya's gaze was a new, white headstone. It was an old stone procured from somewhere, and it had several parts broken and crumbled. At the base was a single dandelion, blooming and swaying in the breeze.

"Though, even if you were alive, I bet you wouldn't have told anyone that strange story..."

With a recoil in his lower body, Chuuya jumped down from the grave. He put his hands in his pocket and walked away with his back to Randou's grave.

"Well, I'll come again..."

Facing away from the cliff, Chuuya began to walk away. However, a boy appeared in front of him, obstructing his path.

"This is where you were? I've been looking for you, Chuuya."

"Shirase..."

It was the silver haired boy. He was one of the three Sheep members looking for Chuuya in the arcade center.

"Did you have something to ask me?" Chuuya asked.

"I need to apologize to you." The silver haired boy shrugged. "Our quarrel before? At the arcade center. After that, I really thought about what you said. You can't do what you want to because of us. At that time, were you really wanting to go catch some criminal? And yet, we were saying that the Sheep's retaliation strategy should be prioritized... You were right. We were the ones who depended on you to make our strategies, and that was wrong of us."

Chuuya had a surprised look on his face as he listened to his friend.

The silver haired boy continued.

"We now know where the Sheep's problems lie." The boy said with a little laugh. "So we all discussed and came to a decision. Will you listen to it?"

"Is that so?" Chuuya said with a bewildered voice and began to walk.

"Well, if it's something you all decided together, I'll listen." Chuuya took a small breath and walked next to the boy. "I'm a little tired of this incident. I'm hoping to increase our breaks... Let's talk while walking. What kind of strategy is it?"

After passing the boy, Chuuya began to walk idly along the cliff. The wind from the sea blew so strongly, it rustled the weeds in the graveyard.

Something strong hit Chuuya in the back, making a thudding noise.

Chuuya leaned forward.

"This is our solution."

Chuuya slowly turned around. The silver haired boy was pressed against his back.

"...You..."

At the same time the silver haired boy pulled away, Chuuya stumbled and fell over.

A new dagger was stuck in his back. From the base of the deeply rooted dagger, fresh blood oozed out.

"Since you're really careful, I have to attack out of your field of vision. This way you don't have time to use your gravity." The silver haired boy had a smile on his face. "Isn't that right, Chuuya? I know you well. We've known each other a long time, after all."

"What... are you doing...?" Chuuya gave a moan of pain as he tried to stand back up. However, his limbs trembled weakly with the effort.

"It's better if you don't move too much. I put a rodenticide on the blade." The silver haired boy's smile grew wider. "For the time being, your limbs will go numb and you won't be able to move around as you usually do. You poor thing, I wouldn't have had to do such a cruel thing had you not been so strong."

"What...was that...?"

Chuuya just barely managed to look behind him and glare at the boy, covering his back wound.

"This—"

The silver haired boy waved his finger. At the same time he did that, countless soldiers appeared around the graveyard, aiming their rifles at Chuuya.

"These guys... the GSS soldiers...?"

Fully equipped mercenaries surrounded Chuuya at the cliff edge, where he had collapsed.

"This is our decision... The Sheep have joined hands with GSS."

The boy said that as he weaved through the soldiers. Other boys who were armed with guns appeared. They all had the same expression as they aimed their muzzles at Chuuya.

"You're awful, Chuuya." The silver haired boy glared down at Chuuya with a smile. "We all realized it this time. 'What if Chuuya really wanted to join the mafia next time?' Anyone could easily imagine it happening. If that did happen, the Sheep has no way to survive. We'd be massacred because we've been relying on Chuuya's frightening ability. Dozens of lives can't be dominated by a single person's mood. This is called 'vulnerability'. Vulnerability of an organization, like a flood breaking through a small hole and destroying the fortress... It's a difficult word, but you understand, right, Chuuya?"

"You... All I understand...is I've been betrayed by my friends..." Chuuya groaned with a pale face. His face was covered in sweat. The poison was spreading.

"In that respect, the GSS doesn't change its loyalties on a whim. As long as they profit, they're reliable. It's a much smarter way to confront the mighty Port Mafia."

Chuuya took a hoarse breath and looked at his surroundings. The boys were mixed in with the GSS and held their guns readily. The boys, who Chuuya had thought of as friends until a few minutes ago, were now scowling at him as if he were a terrifying beast.

"That's right..." Chuuya said as he took a painful breath. "I was the one doing everything... It was annoying..."

"I'm grateful to you, Chuuya." The silver haired boy pulled out the pistol he had on his waist and aimed it at Chuuya. "The Sheep took you in because you had no relatives. But you've paid back enough of that favor. So, Chuuya... You can rest now. After you die, and make one final contribution to the Sheep."

The silver haired boy gave a signal to the soldiers with his chin. "Kill him."

Countless muzzles fired at once.

Chuuya stopped the first bullets that hit him with his ability, but there were too many. The Sheep knew how many bullets were needed to kill Chuuya. Bullets that poured like heavy rain rushed towards Chuuya.

Chuuya avoided the bullets after rolling out of the way with immovable limbs. The bullets drilled countless holes into the weed-ridden ground.

After distancing himself from the siege, Chuuya applied gravity to the soles of his shoes. His body sunk into the ground. The ground around him began to crack. It couldn't withstand the gravity, with it deformed by bullets.

The earth broke easily like a cliff.

Chuuya fell down the cliff together with the earth and sand.

Below the cliff, rough waves broke from the sea.

"He ran under the cliff!" The silver haired boy shouted. "Although the poison weakened his ability, this height isn't enough to kill him! Hurry and find him! We'll definitely kill him!"

* * *

White waves broke and washed the rocks underneath the cliff.

Chuuya staggered as he walked down a bare pathway.

"Dammit..." Chuuya said as he put both hands on a wet rock. "This wound is deep..."

Chuuya concentrated on the wound in his back. He applied a weak gravitational force to where the dagger had pierced him, and slowly pulled it out of his back to drop in the sea.

The poison that had spread throughout his body had dramatically weakened both his ability and physical power.

The Sheep certainly knew how to kill the invincible Chuuya.

Of course they did. Unlike with Randou, Chuuya couldn't hide his hand inside Sheep. It was impossible to hide, because they were friends.

Soldiers were sporadically running around the top of the cliff, yelling at something. Underneath the cliff, he could hear the sound of guns firing. Soon enough, the soldiers would surround Chuuya. There was no way they could let Chuuya live... He knew every hideout, every secret armory, and everyone's criminal record.

Chuuya had a subconscious smile on his lips.

"Leader my ass..." Chuuya said as the waves crashed. "I think I ruined the organization the most..."

Chuuya lifted himself over some rocks. He came out to a slope with scattered trees standing close together. He walked through the grove, pausing every now and then as if he was dragging a wet body with him.

Suddenly—a shadow cast in front of him.

It was a petite shadow. Chuuya had a rigid face as he was surrounded. But this was slightly different.

"Hey, Chuuya. You look like you're having a tough time. Need a hand?"

It was Dazai.

"Dazai..? What are you doing here?" Chuuya mumbled vaguely.

"Work. When I said I was joining the mafia, Mori-san was so pleased he jumped up and down. He said there was no time to waste, then I was given command of this unit and forced to do my first job."

Countless figures appeared to be following Dazai.

It was a group of expressionless mafiosos, all of them wearing dark clothes and holding black rifles. They were like machines that held no mercy.

"It seems the mafia's hostile enemies, the GSS and the Sheep, have formed an alliance. We have to take them out before they can fully cooperate. That kind of work. Well, not that it'll be too difficult. They'll be disposed of before lunch."

Chuuya pressed down on his wound, took a rough breath, and said, "What is...your goal...?" Dazai gave him a pointed look. "Don't say you found me by chance... Are you saving me, selling some favors...?"

"Favors? Saving? That's not it at all. I *hate* you. We're only here to massacre our enemies."

"Massacre..." Chuuya's face froze. "Including the Sheep?"

Dazai was silently grinning at Chuuya for a few seconds.

Then he opened his mouth and said with an implying tone, "Yes. It's a strategy that calls for the slaughter of everyone because they're dangerous enemy organizations. Though, if one of my coworkers... say, someone who knew more about their internal affairs, could tell us how to weaken them, our strategy could be modified."

"A coworker's...advice, huh...?" Chuuya said with a stiff face.

"Yup. A coworker in the Port Mafia. I can't trust the advice of my enemy, but I can trust the advice of my coworker. It's that kind of organization, isn't it?"

Chuuya was silent.

Because he had understood what Dazai meant.

"So that's what this is about..." Chuuya said with a hoarse voice. "You're here for a deal?"

"Now then, I wonder what you'll do?" Dazai smiled as he dodged the question. "Well, I guess someone who lost to me in the arcade was destined to be thoroughly used as my dog when I entered the mafia."

Chuuya glared at Dazai as he took a painful breath. He didn't take his eyes off him, even when he started to sweat and his legs trembled. He stared as if all the answers were written on Dazai's face.

From a distance, the sound of the soldier's footsteps and gunshots could be heard. The time was approaching.

"The members of the Sheep... The children... Don't kill them." Chuuya said as if he were squeezing it out from his lungs. "They took... good care of me."

"Sure." Dazai said with a laugh. "You hear that, everyone? Time for work. As we discussed earlier, no hurting the minors. Let's go—remind them of when the mafia was synonymous with the terror of the night."

Dazai walked into the forest with a dignified manner. The mafia's black suits disappeared in the grove as they silently obeyed, like the followers of death abiding by his command.

Looking at their retreating figures, Chuuya suddenly realized.

"I see." Chuuya said. "Everything that happened before... You set it up? From the time after the phone call in the arcade... to plant distrust of me in the Sheep..."

At the arcade, Dazai called Mori to release the Sheep hostages. After that, the Sheep expected Chuuya to come back, but he prioritized the case and finding the culprit. He didn't explain his true purpose to his friends. As a result, the Sheep realized. Their safety was dependent on Chuuya's mood.

Everything went according to Dazai's plan.

Dazai had read up to the current situation where Chuuya was chased out of the Sheep. He then proposed a strategy to Mori and moved out the support troops. And after waiting until Chuuya was in a situation where he couldn't refuse, he struck a deal.

"He's a demon...that bastard..."

Chuuya stood up, holding his wound, and watched Dazai disappear. He looked for invisible signs that foretold the future created by the jet-black boy.

And said.

"...Bring it on, then..."

Epilogue

Dazai was walking along an underground pathway in the mafia headquarters.

It was a long, white, dreary corridor. Only scattered fire extinguishers and fluorescent lights decorated the hallway. It was an emergency evacuation passageway that was used for enemy attacks.

Dazai had injured his left leg and was using crutches. Next to Dazai was Mori in a white coat and a small child holding a doll.

"—And so, this is your next job." Mori said.

"Hmm. So this kid is gifted, huh... Hey, you—it's ok to use your ability here for a moment, you know."

Dazai spoke to the kid walking by. The kid appeared to be 5, 6 years old. He gave no reaction to Dazai's call, just stared straight ahead while holding the doll.

"I said it, didn't I? This kid can't use his ability on his own will. For that reason, I don't really know for certain what his ability is." Mori said as he put his hand on the child's head. "At a hospital I'm acquainted at, I heard about a child who had injured another child in the same room, so I took custody of him. Rumor has it this kid could seriously injure his companions without moving a finger. It can be dangerous if something happens, so I want Dazai-kun's anti-ability to show the true form of this ability."

Dazai rudely stared at the little kid.

"Kyuusaku!" The child suddenly said, sounding excited. "Hehe, I'm Kyuusaku! Hey, wanna play? Wanna play?"

"Yes, yes, when you're bigger." Dazai replied indifferently.

* * *

In the same corridor, the sound of two shoes resounded as two other figures walked.

"Here's the outline for the meeting." One of the figures said—a tall woman in traditional Japanese clothing. She had fiery scarlet hair that was held up by a hairpin. "Do you have any questions, boy?"

"Can you stop calling me boy?" The other figure—Chuuya, said. "Though, I do have one question. Why are you bringing me to the meeting, Ane-san?"

"Don't call me 'Ane-san'. I'm not that old yet." The woman in Japanese clothing glared at Chuuya. "The reason I'm taking you is obviously for experience. The partner for this meeting is a certain mafia front company. Mori-dono's recent addition, the president of a trading company. When tea is served in the middle of a conversation, it has a tendency to influence negotiations. You should understand early on that unlike in the previous era, not everything will be solved by smashing our partners heads in."

"I see..." Chuuya scratched his head with an understanding look on his face. "But if someone like me sits with those guys and does something disrespectful... What should I do if they get angry?"

"We'll deal with that as it comes." The woman in Japanese clothing politely hid her mouth with her sleeve as she laughed. "If they are swayed so easily by something like that, it's better to destroy them spectacularly."

"...Is that a joke?" Chuuya asked with a troubled look.

* * *

And around the corridor, voices were heard close by.

"Hey, Mori-san, is this kid a boy? A girl?"

"Now that you mention it... I didn't ask. I'll check the documents later."

And around the corridor, voices were heard close by.

"By the way, boy, about that black hat you have. You didn't have it yesterday. What happened?"

"Oh, this? This is..."

* * *

The voices of the two boys overlapped.

On a certain day, at a certain time, in a certain corridor.

An ordinary event that doesn't particularly go down in history or people's memories.

"...Ah!!"

"Ahhhhh! It's you!"

The boy's screams filled the corridor.

The adults watched the two with surprised looks.

"Chuuya! What do you think you joined this organization for?!" Dazai hounded Chuuya in an angry voice. "You're my dog, aren't you?! If I tell you my leg is itchy, you scratch it! If I want to eat soba, you threaten the owner of a soba shop into coming here! If I want to watch a play, you perform a one-man show! It's your job! So what are you doing under Kouyou-san's direct command?! Climbing the ladder?! Smooth sailing?! You're too young, go do some grunt work!"

"I don't know what you're talking about, you scheming bastard! I joined the mafia of my own will, I'm not your subordinate or your dog! You think I didn't know about your tricks?!" Chuuya was talking about his loss. "I looked at the machine later and it seemed like *someone* poured water on the console, so it was more difficult for me to play! It was an invalid match!"

"Huh? Are you being a sore loser, Chuuya? Where's the proof that I cheated? Did you know I had immediately reported this breaking news about you in an article titled, 'This week's Chuuya unwilling to admit defeat' to the whole organization?"

"I wonder who cooperated with you... Wait, wait, wait! It was because of you everyone greeted me with a little laugh when I joined?!"

The two boys screamed and cursed at each other.

The adults were helpless as they watched over them.

"Was it really a good idea to let these two join the same organization?" The woman in Japanese clothes asked Mori.

"It's fine, Kouyou-san." Mori said with a smile. "It's because they're in the same organization that it's fine."

Mori was looking at the hat Chuuya held.

It was a black hat that had a brim on it. Mori gave it to him on the day Chuuya officially joined the mafia.

* * *

"What's with this hat?"

A few days ago on the top floor of the mafia headquarters, Chuuya was gazing at a hat.

"It's a symbol of your recruitment." On the other side of Chuuya, Mori smiled. "Normally in the mafia, whoever recruits you takes responsibility and care over you. As a symbol of that, it is customary for the recruiter to buy an article of clothing and give it to the newbie. I gave Dazai-kun a black coat, and this is for you."

"It's an old hat." Chuuya turned the hat and looked it over. "It's not bad, but... The one Dazai wore was new. Why am I the only one who gets something from a second hand shop? Is there a budget?"

"I didn't buy it at a second hand shop." Mori said with a wry smile. "It was Randou-kun's."

Chuuya suddenly had a look of understanding. After that, he closely held the hat and gazed at it once more.

"I was about to burn and throw all of Randou-kun's stuff away, but before I did that, I first went through everything." Mori said while sitting at his office desk. "It appears two months before his death, he was investigating his last mission as a spy. Perhaps little by little his memory had started to come back. He left a record of his investigation. The type of secret facility he infiltrated, information on his partner's whereabouts, and—investigative records on the lifeform 'Arahabaki' held by the military."

Chuuya stared at Mori, as if he could read his true intentions by looking at his face. But Mori continued to speak with a smile, like a fog deep in a forest that couldn't be obstructed.

"He didn't manage to get the whole truth, but he did get a few pieces of new information. It seems the facility he infiltrated was a military research facility that combined abilities with existing life forms. Man-made gifted research, so to speak."

"The military's... Man-made gifted?"

"And another thing. The name 'Arahabaki' was given by people who witnessed the explosion eight years ago. Naturally, Arahabaki was called a different name at the research facility—it was Prototype Number 258-A."

Chuuya widened his eyes.

After a moment of ascertaining Chuuya's reaction, Mori takes out the document envelope from inside the office desk.

"This is the data collected by Randou-kun." Mori showed Chuuya the envelope. "There are many other interesting things written in here."

"In there... Is the truth..." Chuuya subconsciously reached his hand out. "Arahabaki's... My true identity..."

But right before Chuuya grabbed the envelope, Mori quickly pulled it away from him.

Chuuya looked at Mori suspiciously.

"Sorry, but this is the hidden asset a traitor of the organization had." Mori said with the usual smile on his face. "It's something that was originally going to be burned, and therefore can't be so easily disclosed. This is only available to people who are executives or above in the organization."

Chuuya stirred slightly and quietly stared at Mori.

A few short, tense seconds passed between them.

"I can't see the document until I achieve executive status, huh...?" Chuuya said. "Did you take these precautionary measures because you're worried about my betrayal?"

"I'm not worried about anything of the sort." Mori had a smile like a teacher. "You're the one who should be worried."

"What?"

"Worried about Dazai-kun, I mean. I think the two of you are outstanding, and are roughly equal in merit. However, don't you think Dazai-kun, who works as a subordinate directly under the boss, will become an executive a little faster? What do you think he'd do if he had the authority to get this document before you? Don't you think he'd memorize it then burn it instead of lending it out to you?"

Chuuya's face suddenly went white.

If that did happen—Chuuya could already predict what kind of hellish suffering he would have to go through to get the document's information from Dazai.

"Only a diamond can polish a diamond." Mori said with a satisfied smile. "If the two of you work hard and contribute, the organization will be safe. I want to prove that we can surpass the previous boss without relying on fear and violence."

Chuuya listened to his speech with an unspoken memory.

"I..." Chuuya squeezed out the words in a voice similar to that of a boy's. He gently touched the wound on his back. "I was the Sheep's leader. But all I was given were my friend's anxieties and the reliance of the group. At this point, I'm not that upset about joining your organization and obeying your orders. But can you tell me one thing? What does it mean to be a leader?"

At the boy's serious gaze, Mori's smile abruptly disappeared.

He closed his eyes, then opened them again. Then, with a genuine look that nobody had ever seen before, said,

"The leader stands at the top of the organization, but is also its slave. For the profit and survival of the organization, I will gladly soak in all its filth. Raise my subordinates, position them optimally, and if I need to, use and throw them away. I will gladly do any inhumane act if it's for the organization. That's what it means to be a leader."

Mori shifted his gaze to look out the window at the various cityscapes.

"All to protect this beloved city."

Chuuya listened with clear eyes. He had an expression of innocence on his face, like he was reborn.

"That's... what I was missing."

Chuuya hung his head as he dropped down to one knee. And with a soldier's sharp, commanding voice, he said,

"In that case, I will devote all this blood to you, boss. I will protect this organization that you support as your slave, crush your enemies as your slave, and let those who undermine the Port Mafia know how it feels to be crushed by gravity."

Mori silently watched the boy who bowed with his head on his knee.

The smile on his face was different from any smile he had had before—a kind of mysterious, bottomless smile that ordinary humans wore when they were happy. And said one thing.

"I'm looking forward to it."

* * *



—And that is the full story of how mafia executive Nakahara Chuuya and former mafia executive Dazai Osamu joined the organization.

After that, with Mori as the new boss, the Port Mafia drastically expanded its influence. They established an economic foundation, built an ingenious relationship with the government, and created a system where it would be difficult for the judiciaries to get involved.

A year later, a bigger disaster than this occurred—a wide-scale conflict involving all of Yokohama's criminal organizations, commonly known as, "The Dragon's Head Conflict". The Port Mafia survived this conflict, which is said to be the worst underground conflict in the history of Yokohama, with minimal damage. In the exhausted underground society, the mafia firmly established a relatively broad domination of territory.

Furthermore—around that time Chuuya, who had contributed a remarkable amount of service to the organization, was blessed with a chance to access the materials Randou left behind much earlier than the aforementioned executive position.

A separate report will be made regarding his true identity, the conspiracy of the disappeared research facility, and the actions both Dazai and Chuuya took to uncover them.

The above mentioned is the full story concerning the "Arahabaki Incident".

This report is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ninth Confidential Resource Office, it is strictly prohibited for browsing or taking from unauthorized persons.

That is all.

Document Number: I-41-90-3

<Details of activities from the Port Mafia's gifted users during the Arahabaki Incident>

Reporter:

Assistant Councilor of the Special Ability Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs

Sakaguchi Ango.

* * *

<Supplementary Document>

Document Number: I-41-93-1

Reporter:

— —

Confidential Document Designation—Top Secret

* * *

No matter how deep the night is, the Port Mafia never sleeps.

The devilish capital in the deep darkness of Yokohama, the top floor of the Port Mafia's headquarters.

Among the numerous militia members of the mafia, only those with outstanding loyalty and merit are stationed to guard the floor. The top floor, where the boss's office is located, is a "special case" in mafia territory. Insignificant light, let alone humans, are not allowed to enter unless the mafia wishes for it.

Two mafia guards stood in front of the door.

The boss wasn't in the office since they only guard uninhabited rooms. But the two had alert expressions. No matter where you were or what you were doing, you performed your duty without fluctuating emotions the moment you wake up. Only those with a steel spirit were entrusted with these tasks.

Not once have they conversed or cleared their throats while guarding in the stillness of the night.

The guard heard a small noise.

It was a thumping sound. It was fainter than the sound of a mosquito, so much so that he could mistake it for his own breath. He didn't know where

it came from. But the guards, who stood in the silence for countless hours, would not miss such an unusual sound.

He reflexively grabbed his submachine gun, listening carefully.

"What is it?"

"Don't you hear that?"

After briefly informing his colleague, the guards concentrated all their senses on their surroundings.

They immediately heard it again, the sound of thumping. After that they heard the sound of paper flipping. This time there was no mistake on what they heard.

His colleague grabbed his machine gun.

At this time, the top floor was deserted aside from the mafia guards. It was designed so not even the slightest breeze could penetrate it, so it was unlikely anything would be making a noise.

There was a corridor in front of them and the office behind them. The corridor was empty. Meaning...

"The office...?"

The bodies of the guards tensed up at the sound.

With only the movement of his hand and a glance as a cue, his colleague told him to open the door. The colleague took the office key from his wrist and inserted it into three different key holes, unlocking each of them.

Then he kicked the door open.

Inside the room stood a tall figure. A young man with long limbs was standing in the center of the moonlight. He was holding some documents. The young man slowly looked at the men from the documents he was holding.

"You're late." He said.

"Don't move! Who are you, and how did you get in?!"

The guard shouted, his gun in hand.

"How? What a strange question. I entered how one usually would, by passing through the door behind you gentlemen."

The guard's expressions hardened in anger.

There's no way that happened.

They had been concentrating on guarding the door. Not even a second slipped past them. They would have noticed a termite passing by them, let alone a human being.

The young man calmly smiled at them.

The figure, which was cut out in the pale moonlight, was tall and graceful like a bow and each movement of his was like magic. There wasn't a single wrinkle in his high-end business suit, which was the color of the sea at night. He looked like an actor in a movie, or an extravagant god in ancient Europe.

"I came to read the documents. That's all." The young man said while raising the papers. The document bundles were the ones Mori once showed Chuuya—the research documents about 'Arahabaki' Randou had collected. "It was quite interesting. Especially this passage, 'Randou's former partner, intelligence agent Paul Verlaine, died after betraying him'. As I thought, he forgot many things. After all—I'm alive."

"Put the documents down. If you resist, we'll shoot."

The guard said, pointing his gun at him warily.

He then pushed a button in the lining of his clothes that alerted the security room of an intruder.

Normally, an alarm would sound throughout the whole building and a blockade would come down to block the passageways.

But nothing happened.

"Ahh, sorry, I know you were expecting something, but nothing is going to happen. All the guys in the guard room went on holiday a little while ago. A long holiday."

At the feet of the young man, a case of electronic keys that opened and closed the doors on each floor had fallen. After seeing somebody's blood on the case, the guards instantly realized.

—The guards have already been killed.

"I truly wanted to go in peace. In any case, I'm not looking for a fight. I only came to pick up this document, which is a record of my one best friend's life, and this hat from the dressing room."

Before they knew it, a black hat appeared in the young man's hand.

It was the black hat Chuuya had gotten from Mori.

"This is your final warning. Surrender. Otherwise, we'll shoot you in 5 seconds."

The guard said that, however, he was already preparing for someone from this meeting to die.

Naturally, killing the intruder is a last resort. If possible, they wanted to capture the intruder alive and make them spit out their objectives and their ringleader. That's the mafia way. But this intruder was different. He was an elite who could survive even the mafia's darkness. Someone deeper than darkness. He was likely an ability user, meaning normal fighting doctrines would be useless up against him.

The only gifted who could read their next move was a dead gifted.

So he warned him, "We'll shoot in 5 seconds". It was a sign among the mafia. When one says, "I'll shoot in 5 seconds", they shoot immediately, not even waiting for 1 second to pass.

Shoot.

The guard silently prayed for his colleague to start it.

But no one shot anything.

The guard looked at his colleague, wondering what the hell he was doing.

His *mafia* colleague was standing with his gun in his hand, trembling.

He couldn't raise the gun above his neck.

"Wha...?"

The guard opened his mouth in surprise.

A red alarm bell rang in his head as he reflexively tried to trigger the submachine gun.

He couldn't press down.

His trigger finger was cut and fell to the floor.

Following suit was the barrel of the gun.

Their wrists and shoulders were cut and fell to the ground. Their torsos and backs and jaws and heads all dropped to the ground in severed pieces. Only the legs below their thighs continued to stand on the floor as if nothing had happened.

It was the quiet death of two people who couldn't even scream.

"Oh my, thank goodness. On such a quiet, moonlit night, sounds of gunshots are so unromantic."

The youthful intruder smiled in relief.

He put the document bundles back on the desk and walked towards the window in the middle of the room.

He looked at the pale moon outside the window.

"I wonder where you are in this town, Arahabaki—Nakahara Chuuya." The young man said while gazing out the window. "I thank you for killing my partner—former partner, on my behalf. You seem to be getting stronger. It's about time we met."

As he said that, he pressed his hand against the window.

That window was made of reinforced laminated glass. It was a heat and shock resisting glass pane that could hold off not only a sniper's bullets, but an anti-tank gun. All to protect the boss.

"Arahabaki, the heartbeat of calamity who breathes natural disasters. You are lonely. There is no one in this world who can understand you. You are neither a god nor a human, so you struggle somewhere in between until you die in your own arms. Unless you come to me."

The young man twisted slightly and pushed one leg out horizontally.

Technically, it was a "kick". However, it was too light to be an actual kick, and was silent as if a bird had shaken off its feathers. It looked as if he had only engraved a horizontal line in the air with his toes.

The flash of the kick shattered the reinforced glass into tiny pieces.

The reinforced glass, which had a thickness of several centimeters, became a rain of light that poured to the ground.

"I've waited a long time. But at last." The young man's eyes swayed in the pale light of the moon. "It's time we met, Nakahara Chuuya—*my younger brother*."

As soon as he said that, the young man stealthily jumped out the window with the black hat on his head.

His body was absorbed into the darkness of the earth and vanished from sight.

All that remained was the sound of the night breeze.

The night's curtain, the gathering of a crowd of shadows. The nights of Yokohama are long and deep, and no one can truly see all the way to the bottom.

Continued next time in "Storm Bringer"

Afterword

In this moment, when you're still dwelling on the lingering memory of the story, the sixth edition Bungou Stray Dogs light novel's breaking afterword interrupts you with a, "Hey, how do you feel?"

This novel was actually at first distributed as an amenity to those who attended the "Bungou Stray Dogs Dead Apple" movie last year. The first week this was available to the public was after the publication of the preceding work "BEAST", and the second week it was available became the foundation for this book.

And this book is a "complete version" that has been revised and modified from there. There are new scenes and additional depictions from the original. In particular, the last scene was not in the special edition of the one handed out to the movie attendees.

Now, in order to accept the novel, there were two requirements from the movie production staff. One was a request for a story about Dazai and Chuuya, and another was a story about the past.

I wondered if the time had finally come. To begin with, the character Chuuya first appeared in the third volume. Then, the news that "Dazai and Chuuya were former partners" came out. However, at the time there was no further information on that. What kind of incidents they solved, how long they were partners, what kind of relationship they had, it was all shrouded in darkness.

Back then, I thought it was fine. Imagining was better than reading about it. When I go to the dentist, the scariest thing is waiting in the waiting room, so when I imagine the era of their partnership and what they did, I automatically think about the most powerful things the two did. That's why I kept it a secret.

It was up for interpretation. At least, for a few years.

I managed to get many people to imagine their past. They violently revolved around the heads of many. They revolved too much, beating in the walls of people's heads, until each person created their own kingdom.

Before long, a kind of voice reached out to me from time to time.

"I've imagined enough, now I want some answers."

Well, it would seem so. That's what happened.

So, I started writing. Carefully, because I can only do it little by little. I couldn't surprise everyone too much.

That's this book.

Here are Dazai and Chuuya 7 years before the main story. Some hard parts have already been completed, and some softer parts have yet to be completed. After 7 years, they experience a change that each adult experiences (the change itself is still in the soft darkness of my imagination).

How were these answers? Were they the same as you imagined? Or were they different? As the author, I hope it was a little similar and a little different.

And these answers aren't over yet.

Many more important mysteries remain.

Some events that are expected to happen haven't been mentioned yet. There are more important secrets than what I have mentioned in this book.

Why hide such a big secret? Based on the course of the story, my reasons can seem a bit mysterious or malicious. The truth is simple. I just didn't have enough time to write a special novel (sorry).

So the story continues in "Storm Bringer". There's still a lot to talk about, so we undoubtedly won't be able to cover it all in the next volume. However, I think this is enough information to say, "This is the end of the volume for Double Black's past!"

Oh yeah, one more thing. This "Dazai, Chuuya, Fifteen Years Old" was very well received by the anime staff, especially director Igarashi, and was aired as a TV animation in April 2019. There, the beautiful imagery, cool action, and above all the voice actor's performances, skillfully reenacted the two boys. Please check it out on the big screen.

Finally, thank you to everyone in the movie production staff, Mr. Shirahama of the Bunko Beans editorial department, Harukawa 35 who drew the cover and illustrations, everyone at the agency and bookshop, and everyone who bought this book.

See you in the next volume.

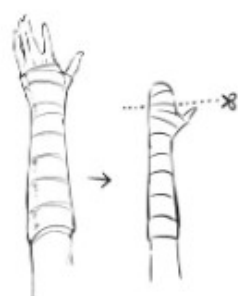
Asagiri Kafka

Character Profiles

太宰
(15)



中。



16歳との差別化で
上着は中に
羽織っていません

負傷後



後の芥川のコート
やや大きめで現時点では
ブカブカな着心地を
意識しています

アニメに合わせて全体変更が入る以前のラフなので
(映画特典小説の頃はギプスが左手でした)
こちらはそのままですね。

中セ
(15)





蘭堂



先代首領



白瀬の少女

Q



一重です



全閉め

